WEIRD ADVENTURES OF PROFESSOR DELAPINE OF THE SORBONNE

G. LINDSAY JOHNSON

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The Revd J.T. Harrott

Xmas 1925.

THE WEIRD ADVENTURES OF PROFESSOR DELAPINE OF THE SORBONNE

THE WEIRD ADVENTURES OF PROFESSOR DELAPINE . OF THE SORBONNE . . . .

BY

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To

My Dear Master

EDMUND LANDOLT, M.D.

HOMMAGE D'AMITIÉ

PREFACE

When travelling in France a few years ago during the summer vacation, I made the acquaintance of a professor of world-wide fame, which acquaintance soon ripened into a lasting friendship. Among the various subjects which we dealt with in our conversation, I happened to mention spiritualism. I told him how bitterly disappointed I had been at the various séances I had attended. Either the séance had passed off without any phenomena at all, or if anything did occur, it had turned out invariably to be a palpable fraud, and had left me more sceptical than ever—besides, I added, the oracular utterances delivered by the medium when in an hysterical condition, which is palmed off to the audience as a trance, were so nonsensical and meaningless as to leave me in doubt whether to be amused at the gullibility of the public, or disgusted at the time I had thrown away in listening to such nonsense.

"Yes," replied the Professor thoughtfully, "that always used to be my view of spiritualism, but since I have seriously examined the subject for myself I have entirely changed my views on the subject. So far from scoffing at it, as I confess I used to, I am now convinced that the real phenomena are far and away more astonishing than are these which these charlatans profess to exhibit or actually produce by conjuring and fraud. Now, if you wish to be convinced that there are genuine phenomena, come with me to Paris and we will investigate the subject together at the great S . . . . . Hospital. Here we found indeed a rich field for our studies. We witnessed there all the phenomena of suggestion, second-sight, clair-audience, hypnotism, dual-consciousness, telepathy, the movement of objects without contact, and many other occurrences of such a surprising nature that in our present state of ignorance they appeared to be altogether outside the laws of Nature as we understand them; and I went away entirely convinced that certain people possess powers such as we ordinary mortals have never even dreamt of.

While I was staying at his hotel, the Professor narrated to me the extraordinary history of Professor Delapine, which he assured me was true, and which with his permission I committed to writing, and worked up into a novel. Observing the intense interest which I exhibited in his narrative, he was kind enough to introduce me to the Professor himself as well as to several of the other characters, and thereby enabled me to fill up the gaps. What I heard certainly bore out the adage that "truth is stranger than fiction." For obvious reasons I have not given the real names to the characters referred to in the novel, since Delapine, Madame Delapine, (Renée), Marcel, and Dr. Riche are still hale and hearty, and very distinguished and popular members of society.

It is needless to say that the coup at the tables related as taking place at Monte Carlo, as well as other events mentioned in these chapters, have been disguised so as to prevent identification of the parties concerned by the general public, although the actors themselves will doubtless recognise and appreciate the details of the narrative.

Should any of our readers be sceptical as to the ability of a person to move objects without contact, and to stop a ball at will on a roulette table, I can only refer them to the experiments of Dr. Ochorowicz[1] which will be found in the June Number of the *Annals of Psychical Research* for the year 1905, wherein will be found an exhausted series of experiments made with a Polish medium named "Julie." In this paper the doctor demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that "Julie" could cause the ball to fall into any of the compartments of the roulette table which the doctor selected in a large percentage of the trials, and, when it failed to tumble into the right compartment, it usually fell into one or other on either side of it.

As regards the trance, I have purposely prolonged its duration to fit in with the plot of the novel, and I have also introduced certain alterations and additions in order to make the story more complete.

[1] Dr. Ochorowicz is professor of Psychology at the University of Lemberg (Lvoff). I am a little uncertain as to the year, as I cannot get access to the *Annals*, but I believe it is the correct date.

I may remark further that the phantom scene of Renée's mother may possibly have been an hallucination on the girl's part, as I have no direct proof of its occurrence, and have only the testimony of a highly emotional girl wearied out with vigils to rely upon. Of course there is the evidence of the lock of hair, which may be seen even to-day, but to my mind that is not sufficiently convincing, and would certainly not be allowed as evidence in a court of law.

Still others who were present assured me that they saw the same phantom (or materialized form) at the séance, and the evidence of such materialization has the great support of one of our most eminent scientists who has a well-deserved reputation for extreme accuracy of statement and cautiousness, and who has assured me personally that he has both seen, handled, and conversed with such an apparition, which was just as real and clothed with the same flesh and blood as any other human being, and he is as certain of its genuineness as he is of his own existence. Moreover, he has repeatedly photographed both the medium and the spirit-form singly and together, which photographs I have seen. Personally I have never witnessed a materialized form, and can only reserve my judgment as to the reality of the phenomenon.

But I feel sure all interpolations and additions will be pardoned by the reader; since the object aimed at was to clothe the real facts with a halo of romance, and thus, without detracting too much from the truth, to render the story much more interesting to the reader.

GEO. LINDSAY JOHNSON,

Castle Mansions, Johannesburg.

It is a vulgar mistake, for which science certainly gives no warrant, to assert that things are impossible because they contradict our experience.

P. Chalmers Mitchell, M.A., DSc., F.R.S.
Thomas Henry Huxley: A Sketch of his Life and Work, p. 245.

Whatever is intelligible and can be distinctly conceived implies no contradiction, and can never be proved false by any demonstration, argument, or reasoning, a priori.

Hume,
On Miracles.

The boundary between the two states—the known and the unknown—is still substantial, but it is wearing thin in places; and like excavators engaged in boring a tunnel from opposite ends, amid the roar of water and other noises we are beginning to hear now and again the strokes of the pickaxes of our comrades on the other side.

Sir Oliver Lodge,
The Survival of Man, p. 337.

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The Weird Adventures of Professor Delapine

CHAPTER I

THE CAFE AT THE CORNER OF THE "BOULE MICHE"

The man who cannot wonder, who does not habitually wonder . . is but a pair of spectacles, behind which there is no eye.
CARLYLE (*Sartor Resartus*, Bk. I. ch. x.)

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.
LONGFELLOW—*Tales of a Wayside Inn. Elizabeth*, pt. iv.

"COMMENT ça va, monsieur le docteur? Pardon that I interrupt your reverie."

The greeting was addressed to a gentleman below middle age who was seated before one of the little round tables at the corner of one of the side streets leading into the Boulevard Michel. He was idly toying with a small glass of eau sucrée between four and five o'clock on a glorious afternoon in the autumn of 19—.

Somewhat short in stature, and slightly built, he was favoured by nature with a pleasing expression, and bright auburn curly locks which matched his bronzed and weather-beaten face. Although his features bore traces of hardship and toil, there was nothing in his appearance to attract any very special remarks from the passers-by. And yet many of them would have turned and looked again at that gentlemanly little figure, had they but known who it was who sat there practically unnoticed by, and unnoticing, the endless

stream of afternoon strollers. He had ordered an eau sucrée, and it certainly was that simple beverage which stood in that glass before him, but it might as well have been tincture of myrrh, or weak tea, or even vinegar, for all the great Dr. Riche knew or cared.

About five feet four inches of his slim neatly-dressed body was sitting there without a doubt, but his mind was far away debating the intricacies of a very delicate operation on the base of the brain, at which he had assisted that morning at the Hotel Dieu. An opening had been made through the nose into the skull of a patient, and the offending tumour had been removed—to all appearances successfully. All the same, the doctor was pondering deeply over the probabilities of the patient's ultimate recovery, and was mentally arguing the pros and cons of this very interesting case, when a gentle tapping of a gold-mounted cane on the marble surface of the little round table in front of him, accompanied by a jovial laugh and a hearty greeting, brought him suddenly down from the regions of the Sella Turcica.

"Well, monsieur le docteur, you have not forgotten me then?"

"Villebois! mon cher, I am delighted to see you. You seem surprised to see me here, eh! Well, as a matter of fact, I may tell you I have only quite recently returned to Paris for a holiday after five years practising in Algiers, and have not yet had time to renew my old acquaintances."

"All the more reason why you should begin at once not only to renew the old, but to make some new ones," said Villebois. "That reminds me, do you remember our discussions in the little room on the third floor at the corner of the Rue Saint André des Arts?"

"What, when we nearly came to blows over our differences of opinion about what you were pleased to call mysterious psychic forces? Yes, I remember, but surely you have outgrown all that?"

"Certainly not. I have had reason lately to be more convinced than ever that I was right. You, my dear Riche, have missed some wonderful phenomena which have recently startled our circle. Levitations, apparitions—"

"Oh, my dear Villebois, remember we are in the

twentieth century; and it is rather out of date to commence believing too implicitly in that sort of thing."

"Out of date? Why, I have seen it with my own eyes. Hardly has the séance begun, when the table begins to rise slowly inch by inch, until it reaches a height of half a metre from the floor, and then more wonderful still——"

"Yes, I know all about it, Palladino, Slade, Home, the Daniels, and the rest, with their cabinets and masks, and rubber hands daubed all over with luminous paint. Besides they perform all their tricks in the dark, lest people should see through their frauds. What I want to know is why they cannot do their supernatural performances in a private house which is unprovided with trap doors, and other nicknacks and apparatus."

"Still the same unbeliever I see: your five years stay abroad has not altered you much in that respect. But if you will allow me to introduce you to my friend the professor I think you will alter your opinion."

"But where is this prodigy to be found?"

"When you cease that mocking tone, I'll tell you."

"Proceed, mon cher Villebois: I will be as serious as a clown at the pantomime."

"Well, you remember Delapine?"

"What, that youthful professor who gave such a wonderful course of lectures on physics in the laboratory at the Sorbonne?"

"The same," answered Villebois. "He is staying for some time with us at Passy, and is giving us the most wonderful exhibitions of his powers. Talk about a genius, the recitals of his experiences, his inventions, and his discoveries fairly dazzles one; and, in addition, he declares that he possesses such an extraordinary mediumistic powers that he can call up spirits at will."

"But I thought that you did not believe in these extraordinary psychic forces, that you were too well grounded in natural science to believe in any phenomena which are incapable of being treated mathematically, or which could not be subjected to the rigid tests of the laboratory."

"That is so," answered Villebois. "If I had not witnessed these phenomena with my own eyes, and subjected them to my own tests I should have felt disposed to

put them down to charlatanism. At first, I was inclined to think that he was 'off his head,' but when you hear him talk with such brilliancy and logic, and when you see him with your own eyes perform the things which I have seen him do, you will agree that there is not a saner man to-day in the whole of our beloved Paris. At times again, his brain appears to be too big for him, and he is apt to go off into fainting fits—or trances, as he calls them—and on occasions he remains for hours in that state: you could almost swear that he was dead, and yet he wakes up as fresh as the proverbial daisy, to amaze us all with the recital of experiences during the trance."

"How extraordinary; forgive my previous mockery, my dear Villebois. I assure you I am as anxious now as I was indifferent before about meeting your friend. Perhaps he may have some recollection of me."

"Ah, I thought you would want to meet him, and I can assure you that you will not regret it. Pack up and come and stay with us at Passy. There are several charming people staying with us including Renée, the daughter of old Payot. You know whom I mean. Then there is Monsieur Marcel, a philosopher and poet, a cynic in a way, but a first-rate fellow notwithstanding, and lastly a most inquisitive and argumentative young lawyer—Monsieur Duval. With you, my dear colleague, the party will be complete, especially as you are an exponent and past master of agnosticism combined with a mind open to conviction, and possess an aptitude for strictly scientific investigation. I have no doubt that between us we ought to be capable of sifting these mysteries to the bottom. If there is any trickery about it, I can rely on your finding it out and exposing it, but I am fully convinced beforehand that you will not find any."

"Que diable, but I have seen enough of Delapine to know that he is incapable of humbug or trickery. All the same, my dear confrère, you have infected me with your enthusiasm, and the programme that you offer me is as tempting as a première at the opera."

"Including the renewal of your acquaintance with the charming Mademoiselle Payot," added Villebois with a smile.

"Just so. Is there not some poet who says, 'Beauty lends enchantment to the view'?"

Villebois rose slowly and surveyed himself in one of the massive mirrors near the window, and smiled complacently at his old friend's levity, while carefully smoothing down the large "wings" of his professional black cravat.

"Say rather with Goethe 'Das Ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan,'" said Villebois, who knew his German remarkably well for a Frenchman.

"However," he continued, "I must leave you now. Let me assure you once more what a pleasure it has been to meet you again after such a long absence. We will expect you, then, in two days' time at Passy."

"Very good, I will come with pleasure," replied Dr. Riche, "and please pay my respects to Madame Villebois and the others."

"Thanks, thanks, au revoir until the day after tomorrow," called out Villebois as he hailed a fiacre, and vanished down the boulevard towards the Louvre.

Left to himself, and now fully awakened from the deep reverie which had overshadowed him previous to the arrival of his old friend, Dr. Riche gently drew from his pocket a large and most un-Gallic looking pipe and pouch well supplied with a famous mixture of his own composition, and proceeded to enjoy in open daylight that most delightful but, under the circumstances, most unprofessional luxury, a good smoke.

"Delapine? Delapine?" he said musingly to himself. "Of course I remember Delapine at the Sorbonne. What a genius that fellow was. A perfect marvel in making experiments in physics! Developed into an exponent of psychic forces has he? Well, well, I must say though, that I am not surprised. He certainly gave promise of a great future in the world of science. Has he become a Medium I wonder? Perhaps he goes off into trances like Swedenborg was said to do. Some one, I cannot just remember who it was, told me that Delapine could foretell the future, and know what is happening in other parts of the world, or even in the Beyond. Well, well, there must be something in it, if Delapine says so. He is genuine, there can

be no doubt about that. It is certainly remarkably interesting, and it would be worth going there if only to see him and be present at his séance. Besides, there is Mademoiselle Villebois, who is growing up into such a charming girl. I really must have a look at her as well. Ah! yes, I well remember how Villebois used to twit me about being too susceptible to the charms of the fair sex. It will be quite refreshing to find Villebois, Delapine and Payot under the same roof again after that long separation. Well, who knows? It is quite on the cards——"

At this stage in his meditations something caused Dr. Riche to gaze slowly round the adjoining tables, and to take a casual glance for the first time that afternoon, at some of those of his fellow-mortals who were in his immediate neighbourhood. For a moment, no one in particular appeared to cause him any special interest. Then, turning slightly, he became aware that two ladies had seated themselves close to him at one of the small tables in a little recess.

"Mother and daughter, evidently," he muttered to himself.

That the doctor's surmise was correct was evinced a few seconds later when he heard a clear and penetrating voice—

"Mais non, petite mère, ne vous en fâchez-vous. Although it is true that I have obtained some very startling results, you must remember that there are times when my 'power,' as you call it, seems to vanish, and I do not appear to be able to read anything of either the past or the future."

"But why do you do it at all, Violette? Why have you not given it up as I have so often implored you? You know that it is altogether against my wishes, and really I often feel quite afraid that some day some misfortune—quelque chose d'un grand malheur—will come of it all."

"Not a bit, you are much too anxious, petite mère."

"Ah, if I could be sure, but I cannot help my anxiety when I see you so abstracted, so—what do you say?—so distraite and so enfeebled, after you have had one of those long séances; and I notice lately that you appear to be suffering from nervous exhaustion especially after you have

foretold something more than usually startling. Please be guided by me, dear, and let me take away that mysterious ring, and lock it away from you for a month—for six months. Perhaps if you did not have it so much en évidence, you might gradually forget its fascination."

"You dear anxious petite mère, to hear you talk one would imagine I was under some evil influence just because I am fond of my lovely antique ring, and like to have it always with me. As for being distraite, ma mie, it has nothing to do with my ring. I often have little times of reverie. Even when I was at the convent the sisters have often rebuked me because I was able to tell them such mysterious things that came to me in my long day-dreams in the dear old convent grounds."

"But you are no longer a child at the convent," interrupted the elder lady, "and you should not encourage these ideas of clairvoyance."

"Don't let us talk about it please, ma mère chérie," replied the younger of the two ladies, with a most impressive shrug of the shoulders, "let us talk of something else instead. Read this letter which I received this morning at the Poste Restante."

Opening her reticule she took out a small and delicately scented envelope which she placed at the edge of the table, after having handed its contents to her mother.

"Read this and tell me what you think of it."

Doctor Riche, who had been a silent listener to this conversation, after consulting his watch, drained his glass of eau sucrée, and rose with the intention of departing.

At this moment a garçon, carrying a tray filled with glasses high above his head, opened the door, and a sudden gust of wind lifted the little envelope off the table where Violette was sitting, and wafted it almost to the doctor's feet. Picking up the scented envelope with a dainty touch, he handed it to the elder lady with a ceremonious bow:

"Pardon, madame, allow me," said Riche as he glanced in a cursory manner at the address written upon it.

If the doctor expected to learn the fair unknown's private, or even perhaps her professional address, he was doomed to disappointment. The envelope which had un-

expectedly fluttered to his feet merely bore the inscription, in a woman's handwriting:

A Mademoiselle Violette Beaupaire,
Poste Restante,
Paris.

"Merci, monsieur: que vous êtes bien gentil."

The doctor bowed again, and in so doing his eyes rested on the middle finger of the younger of the two ladies who had been addressed as Violette.

"What a lovely ring, and what a wonderful appearance it has," said the doctor, gaining courage as the ladies smiled at him. "Mademoiselle will permit that I may regard it, n'est ce pas? That is if mademoiselle will pardon a stranger?"

"With all my heart, monsieur, it is quite often that someone asks to be allowed to examine my ring, and they nearly all say how peculiar and unusual it looks. Then, when they have examined it, they invariably remark, 'But is it not too large a ring for mademoiselle to wear,' ah, but you see, monsieur, they do not know."

"But I forget something, mademoiselle; permit me to present myself, Doctor Riche, just returned from Algiers, entirely at the service of madame and mademoiselle."

"We are charmed to make the acquaintance of monsieur le docteur," said the other lady "as we know Algiers well and have often heard of his skill. Will not monsieur le docteur be seated while my daughter allows him to regard the ring?"

Seating himself beside the fair Mademoiselle Violette, the doctor took advantage of the kind offer of the two ladies, and began to examine carefully the object of their conversation. It was a splendid specimen of the scarabæus beetle carved out of a pale-greenish Beryl,[1] and fitted into a curiously wrought gold setting.

"What a valuable piece of jewellery, no modern bijoutier fashioned this," said the doctor, after a long and interested examination of the beautiful object before him.

[1] The Beryl, and especially this particular shade of Beryl was greatly prized by the ancient magicians for its supposed virtues in assisting the crystal gazer.

"It has quite a little history attached to it I expect," said Mademoiselle Violette, "if we only knew. It was given to me a few years ago by Suleiman Bey who found it in a tomb belonging to one of the Pharaohs. Look, when I place it in front of me, so, and gaze at it steadily, there are times when I see in its depths the most wonderful things and the likenesses of people, some of whom I have never seen, and some again whom I seem to recognise."

"But it is quite extraordinary!" replied the doctor.

"Would you like me to look into it for you? Just to see if it will tell us something of your past, or what has happened to you, or some of your friends perhaps?" asked Violette.

"Ah, mademoiselle, I can see you are a sorceress, but I know my past already, alas! too well; would it not be a thousand times more interesting if you were to test its wonderful powers by letting me see a little way into the future?"

"I do not know whether I can do that, but if you will please to sit opposite to me, and be very very still without speaking, and be sure and keep your mind quite passive, and believe all the time that I really do hold the power, I will try."

Placing the ring on the table in front of her in the centre of a black silk handkerchief to avoid reflections, and bidding her companions to keep absolutely still and silent, Violette muttered some words in a very low tone, as if repeating some weird incantation, and then proceeded to concentrate her entire thoughts, and gaze fixedly on the ring.

Unconsciously disobeying the instruction to keep his mind quite passive, Doctor Riche could not help studying the face of the young girl before him, and noticing, as the seconds went by, the gradual change that was beginning to come over her. From a half careless insouciance when she first placed the ring on the table in front of her and began to look into its depths, her whole manner and bearing seemed now to have changed to one of most absorbing interest, which gradually altered, until her face bore traces of great mental anguish. So strong was the appearance of severe distress that the whole reserve of his well-known

professional tenderness of heart surged to the doctor's brain, and was on the point of giving itself vent in speech, when a soft, almost entranced voice apparently some distance off was heard, as in a whisper :—

"Mon Dieu, it is terrible. Listen. It is a house in one of the suburbs of Paris. There is a large room. It opens into a smaller chamber by a large door. The door is locked. I see eight people sitting down in a half circle. They hold each other's hands. There are, let me see, one, two, three, four, five men, and three ladies. One of the ladies is young and very pretty, with dark wavy hair, and wonderfully brilliant eyes. The other is of middle age, and is wearing a wedding ring. I see one of the men, he looks to be about thirty-five years old, he is separated from the others. He has long black hair and a pointed moustache. His face is very white, and his eyes are slowly closing. They are putting him to sleep. He sleeps, oh, mon Dieu, how still he is, he looks like the dead. Attendez, attendez, encore une minute. It is not so clear now to see him. There is a vapeur, like a big white cloud slowly over-wrapping him. Now it is getting smaller—what you say, 'condensing'—and is taking a human form, but it is much more handsome than the sleeper. Now the form is moving its lips as if it were speaking, now it is fading away from the room, and the company seems to be afraid, they are all very quiet. There is one of the men—he looks like a doctor—he seems very anxious, he is uneasy, he is bien faché as he looks at the sleeper. He regards closely, he touches him, he takes his wrist and feels the pulse. He calls out, he cries, 'My God! He is dead!' Everyone rushes up to him and—ah, the picture fades."

"Mon Dieu," cried out Riche, "Try again, mademoiselle, can you see anything else?"

"Wait. Yes. The picture is forming itself again. Ah, but it is not the same room. I see an open drawer in a writing table, there is a large envelope in the drawer. There are five large seals, and there is something written on the envelope. It is fading—I cannot make it out. There is a name, Henri—Henri D— No, I cannot see more. It has faded. I see nothing."

Pale as marble, and with a look of strained enquiry in

her eyes, the young girl leaned back in her chair and appeared quite oblivious to all around her. Then slowly closing her eyes, she sighed deeply, and turning to her mother said :—

"Oh, but it is too terrible, it is too much."

Thinking that she was about to collapse in a fainting fit, the doctor hastened to procure assistance.

Quietly making his way through the open door, so as not to attract too much attention to his companions, he called two of the garçons; and telling one to carry some eau-de-vie to the ladies, he gave instructions for the other to have a fiacre ready.

When he returned to the little table in the recess, the two ladies were nowhere to be seen. He enquired of the waiters, but they could give him no information as to where they had gone. The bill had been paid, but beyond that they knew nothing. Dr. Riche waited for some minutes, and at length prepared to leave the café.

"Diable, mille diables!" he exclaimed. "If it was genuine then it was extraordinary, but if it was not genuine, it was a clever and a very interesting imposture. But the imposture sans motif? That would not be the 'sens commun.' The whole thing is very mysterious. I would give anything to find out where they live, but it is quite useless to hunt for them now. Just my cursed luck again." Picking up his gloves and cane in an abstracted and almost dazed manner, the worthy doctor, after glancing up and down the street, moved quietly away and joined the throng of promenaders.

Doctor Riche was one of those bons viveurs who believe in comfort, and was always to be found on his visits to Paris at one of those snug and at the same time fashionable little hotels, much frequented by married couples, which abound in the neighbourhood of the Louvre or the Tuileries along the Rue de Rivoli.

In the evening of the second day after his meeting with his old friend Villebois, he might have been seen settling his bill at the bureau of the Hotel Chatham, while a couple of porters were transferring his luggage to the fiacre.

It was a lovely autumn evening when he left the hotel. A vapour had crept up the valley of the Seine, and hid its

banks. A warm mist was rolling over the city, while here and there were gaps revealing the intense turquoise blue of the sky as the fiacre sped past the palace and gardens of the Tuileries and the avenue of the Champs Elysées, lined by rows of trees all decked in their multi-coloured foliage.

The sun setting behind Meudon illuminated the Bois with its beams which strove to struggle through, while as it journeyed west, the windows of the Louvre and the Tuileries reflected the golden splendour of its rays. The Seine, curving like a huge snake, scintillated with all the colours of the rainbow, while through the mist the dark square towers of Notre Dame stood up like two silent sentinels mounting guard. Far away towards the Bois in sharp relief against the sky, the mighty steel scaffolding of the Tower Eiffel rose majestically above the Trocadero, looking down from its dizzy height on to the vast city at its feet.

The great dome of the Pantheon on the other side of the river resembled a ball of burnished copper. Slowly the colours changed as the vista darkened, and the shadows vanished into the gloom, while the clouds above the horizon changed into a fiery red bordered by an expanse of orange, yellow and purple. The Heights of Montmartre were still bathed in rosy sunshine. As the setting sun vanished a deep grey seemed to settle over the city, which throbbed with its passing traffic like the cadence of the tide on a pebbly beach, as he sped along the Avenue du Trocadero and past the Maison Lamartine. Leaving the Bois, he could just get a glimpse of the lakes of La Muette nestled behind it, while a little to the south, resembling a casket of jewels, lay the charming suburb of Auteuil.

"Auteuil, lieu favori ; lieu fait pour les poètes
Que des rivaux de Gloire unis sous tes berceaux." *

The cocher drove past the church and the red marble pyramid which marks the tomb of the noble chancellor d' Aguesseau, and then turning down the Boulevard Rossini, he pulled up at a little detached villa near to the one at

* Chénier ' Promenade.'

which Rossini died, and the doctor at length found himself at the house of his friend Villebois.

Doctor Riche recognised it as one of those delightful little detached villas for which Passy and Auteuil are so famous. A wall surmounted by ornamental railings, half-screened the garden from the footway, while behind the house was a small grass-plot surrounded by a double row of damask rose trees. In one corner of the back garden lay a pretty rustic summer-house, shut in by creepers among which lovely cyclamen flowers, clematis blossoms, and lilac shed their perfume and added their brilliant colours to the dense green of the ivy.

As he entered the hall, adorned with the trophies of the chase, Madame Villebois came forward to welcome him.

"At last, mon cher docteur, we are all impatient to meet you. My husband and I are anxious to hear the stories of your adventures with the Arabs in Algeria, and all my friends are here to welcome you. I suppose that you have led a bachelor life so long that you will hardly feel at home in our family circle."

"Oh, madame, how can you be so cruel? You should rather ask, 'Is it not like returning to rest in paradise after having been driven out into the wilderness.' I really feel as if I were the prodigal son returning home to partake of the fatted calf. You can't imagine what a relief it is for me to return to our beautiful Paris after my voluntary exile." So saying the doctor was ushered into a large saloon with folding doors, which, when opened, converted the two rooms into one.

The walls were covered with a Japanese paper ornamented with patterns in old gold on a red background; but so wonderfully were the designs made, that they heightened rather than lessened the effect of the charming old oil paintings by Hobbema, Jan Van der Heyden, Boucher, Claude and Meisonnier. The furniture was of stained oak, rather heavy but beautifully carved, and almost as black as ebony with age. In one corner was a large "grandfather's" clock, by Vulliamy, and ornamented with Louis Quinze panels, whilst on the marble mantle-piece was a Louis XVI. timepiece mounted on a wonderful creation of Sèvres porcelain, and placed between two

exquisite china groups with medallions painted by Watteau.

Passing through the folding doors one entered a smaller but much brighter room, with a white ceiling ornamented with groups of mythological figures. At the further end a door opened into a conservatory filled with curious insectivorous plants, choice orchids and other rare exotics, many of which exhaled a deliciously sensuous perfume. Passing through the hothouse, one stepped immediately on to the lawn of the back garden.

As Doctor Riche entered the smaller room, Madame Villebois proceeded to introduce him to the company. The moment he glanced round the assembled guests, his eyes were riveted on a particularly sweet, dark-haired girl, and a tall remarkable looking man, who were chatting together on one of the settees in the corner of the room.

"This is Mademoiselle Payot, and Monsieur le Professor Delapine whom you have doubtless heard of," said the hostess, smiling.

Although Riche had heard so much of the professor, he had never had the opportunity of seeing him in private life before. What attracted him was the piercing brilliancy of his eyes. They were of a steel blue colour, and seemed to bore one through like an intense auger, making the doctor feel conscious that Delapine was peering into his very soul, and was reading his most secret thoughts. They turned perpetually here and there so that nothing could escape his penetrating glance.

The professor had a habit of nervously playing with his fingers which spread over every object they touched like the tentacles of a medusa, as if they were eager to come into contact with the ultimate particles of matter.

Delapine stood nearly six feet high, with very dark glossy hair falling almost to his shoulders, and wearing a moustache with twisted ends and a short pointed beard. The professor was invariably attired in a black frock coat and cravat, the sombreness being relieved by the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour. He was a man who would command attention anywhere. Active, alert, with an imposing presence, he stood out from the crowd as one born to command. The pale, almost wax-like face, the

lofty brow, the firm compressed lips ever and anon breaking out into a smile, all contributed to form a personality which would be both respected and loved. Delapine was slow and measured in speech, and possessed a rich voice of peculiar charm and flexibility which impressed and delighted his audience. He had that power of modulating it to suit the nature of the theme, by which the members of his class were enabled to select without effort the essentials from the non-essentials of his discourse. At times he would pause, and turning his head half round would scan the listeners with his piercing eyes, as if to judge the effect of his words. But ever and anon his overpowering personality would convey the effect of one inspired, and he could elevate the simplest subjects to heights undreamt of, and stamp an indelible impression of it on their imagination. A subject, which in the hands of most men would sound tame and uninteresting, would, when dealt with by him, become illuminated and clothed by the most apt illustrations and exalted thought. No wonder that his students became permeated with the enthusiasm of the master. He seemed to Riche to be the ideal of an experimental philosopher and physicist.

But here the doctor was roused from his reflections by the cheery voice of Villebois.

"Hullo, Riche, mon vieux, vous voilà enfin! Come along and let me introduce you to Monsieur Marcel, our poet, philosopher and friend; and also to Maitre Duval, our youngest member of the bar of whom I told you before."

Marcel was a curiosity in his way. A bit of a dandy, and a great favourite with the fair sex, he seemed to be always in evidence when any function of importance was going on. He rather prided himself on the originality of his dress, and invariably appeared at dinner in knee breeches, black silk stockings, a white waistcoat, embroidered with many coloured flowers, and a velvet coat, while his neck was adorned with a blue silk bow of vast and convincing proportions. The back of his neck was entirely hidden by the length of his hair, which fell on his shoulders in lustrous locks after the manner of the poet Milton. Was it not then natural that such a beautiful prize should be competed for by the ladies to grace their

receptions? But although a fop as regards his dress, Marcel showed traces of real genius, and had already begun to be talked about for his wit and power of repartee. In fact no lady considered her house completely furnished unless a copy of his sonnets, or his epigrams bound in the most delightful of plush covers was to be found in her boudoir.

Duval was quite another character. Young, clever, pushing, and extremely self-opinionated, he was nevertheless very narrow-minded, and obstinate and jealous to a degree. When he had made up his mind to any course of action he stopped at nothing to carry it out, and threw caution to the winds. His clean shaven face save for a slight moustache revealed a hard mouth with thin, closely set lips, and a square, firm jaw. Truly such a man was more likely to be feared than loved, and few would venture to make an enemy of him.

"What did you say that gentleman's name was who is arguing with our friend the poet?"

"Pierre Duval, a new advocate just admitted to the bar. Quite a rising man, I assure you. A man who is anxious to attain to fame by every road, and as cheaply as possible. Oh, by the way, here is my daughter, Céleste," exclaimed Villebois, as she came into the room all blushes and confusion for being so late.

"What has kept you so long, Céleste?"

"Oh, papa, it's all the fault of those wretched dresses of mine."

"What on earth do you mean, my child?"

"Well, papa, it's this way. I did want to look very nice, and I found that I had nothing to wear."

"Nothing to wear? What do you mean, Céleste? Why, I wager you have ten times as many dresses as Renée."

"Yes, that may be, but you wanted me to sit next to Marcel, and I had nothing that would harmonise with his lovely waistcoat. The moment I saw it, I knew at once that it would kill all my dresses. I found I could not match it, do what I would. At last I had to put on something, and now look at me," and a tear rolled down her cheek.

"My dear Céleste, you look lovely, I assure you. You always seem to me to be trying to attempt the impossible.

A woman who cannot make herself charming loses half the battle in the beauty competition. It is far better to appreciate the dresses you cannot have than to have the dresses you cannot appreciate. Don't forget that a woman who makes herself charming by her manner can afford to wear anything she pleases without offending the company."

"Yes, I know you are right, papa, although if you were to ask me I could not tell you why."

"I am afraid my daughter imagines that she is out of harmony with everyone in the room."

"Not in the least, papa, but you know the greatest pleasure I can have is to please our guests, and how can I do that better than by having nothing on that can offend the eye."

"Yes," replied the doctor smiling, "half her punishment was already removed when Eve was permitted to decorate herself with fig-leaves."

"Oh, papa! How can you say such dreadful things? But I think I understand what you meant when you spoke to me about being charming as well. You meant that a cheerful, bright, smiling face and nice courteous manners count more than a pretty frock."

"Quite right, my little rosebud," said Villebois, tenderly kissing her on the forehead, "live up to those ideas, and you will never go far wrong. The world, they say, is ever growing old, but youth asserts itself on every side, and gives the world the lie. Happy, joyous youth," he added with a sigh, "what would we give to feel once more the young blood coursing through our veins. Make the most of it, Céleste dear, while you possess it. Youth, hope and love are the only things that count. We old folks can only enjoy the memory of those sweet days. When you know English better I must lend you my volume of Coleridge's poems, which I know you will like. If I remember rightly there is a charming poem about youth which begins:—

Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,
Where Hope clung feeding like a bee,
Both were mine, Life went a-maying,
With Nature, Hope and Poesy,
When I was young.

Flowers are lovely ; Love is flower-like,
Friendship is a sheltering tree ;
O ! the joys that came down shower-like
Of Friendship, Love and Liberty,
When I was young.

"How very pretty," said Céleste. "I must hurry on with my English, as I should dearly love to read beautiful poetry like that."

"Yes," said Villebois with a little sigh, "youth is life, but youth without faith and hope is worse than death. To grow old and never know it, or to have your friends suspect it, that is happiness indeed."

"What are you two people talking about?" said Riche joining them.

"Father is giving me a sermon on youth and happiness," said Céleste, smiling. "What is your recipe for happiness, doctor?" she added enquiringly after a pause.

"Happiness, my dear mademoiselle, is a habit. You must learn to cultivate it. In time, by constant practice, it will become automatic and part of yourself."

"A very good answer, my dear Riche, a very good answer," said Villebois approvingly. "I must give that prescription to some of my patients—they sadly need it."

CHAPTER II

THE DINNER AT THE VILLEBOIS' HOUSE

Ce qu'il y a de plus beau dans la vie c'est les illusions de la vie.
BALZAC, *Physiologie du Marriage*, Med. iv.

Since Eve ate apples much depends on dinner.
BYRON, *Don Juan*, Cant. viii.

Wine whets the wit, improves its native force,
And gives a pleasant flavour to discourse.
POMFRET (*The Choice.*)

"ALLONS, allons," said Madame Villebois, "we can discuss all about dress while we are having our dinner, although I really think that people in these days give too much attention to both dress and eating."

"Ah, no, madame, permit me to disagree," said Marcel, smiling. "It seems to me that this is becoming the age of small things. The modern man can now without discomfort carry his dinner in a sandwich-case, and the modern woman considers her luggage complete if she is carrying her latest dress creation in her handbag."

"Dinner is the greatest peacemaker of civilisation yet invented," said Villebois; "together with a good glass of red wine it makes us, for the time being, friends with all the world. The busy man may consider it a trifle, but to my mind it is only the trifles after all which count. Nations, for instance, never go to war about important matters. What was the cause of the Franco-German war? Merely an absurd argument about the candidates for the Spanish throne, a matter that few cared two sous about. Is not the entire human race (according to the authority of the Holy Church) doomed to everlasting perdition simply

because a woman ate an apple, or something which she was told not to—goodness only knows how many centuries ago? Did not England become a Protestant country simply because the Pope refused to allow Henry the Eighth to divorce his wife Katherine?"

"But I can give you a better instance," said Riche. "If we are to believe Dr. Ross, the decline and fall of the glorious Greek nation was due to the merest trifle in the world—a tiny insect—the Anopheles, a malaria-carrying mosquito."

"Really, is that a fact?" interposed Marcel, "but talking of trifles, what do you think of Napoleon having to abdicate simply because his cook roasted a fowl in too great a hurry, and so caused him to have an attack of indigestion, whereby he lost the great battle of the Nations at Leipzig."

"This sounds like trifling with our common-sense," said Pierre to Renée in the hope of attracting her attention away from Marcel.

"Yes," said Delapine who had just caught the word 'trifles,' "I owe everything to trifles. They control the essentials of life. The man who can see further than other men is doubtless a genius, but he who can do that and at the same time attend to trifles and details goes much further; he not only rises to the top, but he stays there."

"Details are always vulgar," whispered Pierre to Renée, as he helped himself to a slice of pheasant stuffed with truffles.

"Did you say vulgar?" asked Marcel, who had just managed to catch the last word of the whispered conversation, "I agree with our friend Villebois that our happiness is largely made up of trifles: perhaps that accounts for the fact that lovely woman has devoted her life to trifling. The divine creatures trifle with our hearts, and then when they have stolen them, they make tire-lires of them."

"I have studied the fair sex all my life," said Riche, "and I assure you I understand them less now than ever. When a man flatters himself that he understands a woman, he——"

"Merely flatters himself?" interposed Marcel laughing.

"Woman generally tries to attract a man's eye, by means of her feminine magnetism and then blames him for being caught by prettiness and superficial charms. But she rarely tries to appeal to his better self," said Delapine.

"Life, after all," interposed Riche, "is a tragedy to those who feel, but to those who think, it is only a huge comedy. My rule is never to appear in earnest, except, of course, when seeing my patients. If a man is serious, everyone votes him a bore, and the ladies only laugh at him. An over-sensitive conscience is simply the evidence of spiritual dyspepsia. The man who has it is no better than his fellows."

"A man considers his little weaknesses mere amiable traits," said Pierre, "whereas a woman——"

"Will not admit that she has any," said Marcel.

"A woman is invariably right," said Dr. Riche with a sigh. "A woman is guided by instinct, a man by reason, and for the good it does him he might as well have never thought at all."

"Yes," interrupted Marcel, "and if you prove that she is in the wrong, she will become the more convinced that she was right all the time, and you will only get laughed at for your pains."

"My dear Marcel," said Villebois, "you will be making enemies of the ladies if you say that, and to make them your enemies is worse than a crime—it is a folly!"

"The gentle art of making enemies is the only natural accomplishment which is common to all sorts and conditions of men," added Riche.

"One can never be too careful in the choice of one's enemies," said Marcel, toying with a dish of salted almonds. "I always choose my enemies more carefully than I do my friends, and therefore they respect and appreciate me. Isn't that so, Monsieur Duval?"

"At any rate," replied the young advocate, "one's enemies are much the more useful—they can be counted on to advertise us behind our backs, whereas our friends merely flatter us to our faces."

"How tasteless is the soup unless flavoured by the sauce of our enemies," said Marcel.

"You seem to be taking a very pessimistic view of mankind," exclaimed Villebois. "I believe there is a substratum of good in all bad people, and if one makes enemies it is to a great degree one's own fault."

"From all our enemies, and most of our friends, good Lord deliver us," added Riche.

"To my mind," said Villebois, "bad and good men are only a matter of degree. It entirely depends upon the point of view, and there is a great deal more in the point of view than is generally admitted."

"Yes," said Marcel, "our weaknesses we regard as misfortunes from which we cannot escape; whereas the weaknesses of others we consider to be shocking crimes. While we all pretend to hate sin, we are only charitable to the sinner when we happen to be the one in question."

"Ah, well, the devil is never so black as he is painted, in fact he is far more like us than we care to admit," said Delapine. "I feel sure," he added, "if we saw ourselves as others see us, we should refuse to believe our own eyes. If we could only combine what others think of us with what we think of ourselves we should probably get at the truth."

"Good and bad are only abstracts," interrupted Pierre, "but money, good solid tangible money, is, after all, the only thing of real importance in this world."

"But surely there are things of more value than money," said Riche enquiringly.

"Of course there are," replied Pierre, "and that is why I need all the money I can get to acquire them. Take lovely woman, for example. A man with money can marry any girl he pleases."

"Ah! you are right there," interrupted Marcel. "I for one believe that women only admire the gilded youth because he is a golden calf!"

"Important things are out of fashion," said Delapine. "People now-a-days will argue for hours about such things as the flavour of wines, the latest novel, or a new way of driving a golf ball; but deadly serious matters, such as being married or hanged, or the chances of a future life in Heaven or Hell are treated as a huge joke, if they are ever referred to at all."

"I still maintain that money comes before everything," said Duval. "With money one can buy everything worth having: pleasures, friendship, and even love. As Goethe says:

"Ja! wenn zu Sol sich Luna fein gesellt,
Zum Silber, Gold, dann ist es heitre Welt;
Das Ubrige ist alles zu erlangen;
Paläste, Gärten, Brüstlein, rote Wangen."

"No, no, a thousand times no," cried Delapine, "that I never can agree to. Riches will not buy everything, in fact they will scarcely buy anything that is genuine, or worth having—neither real pleasures, friends, nor genuine love—nor is it essential to success. A man's life should be judged by the results obtained, or by the work he has achieved, not by the amount of money he has accumulated. Happiness is not obtained by money, but is the outcome of conscious usefulness. The accomplishment of good work of any kind produces more solid contentment and satisfaction than all the money in the world. True happiness lies in content, and sweet content finds everywhere enough. Nearly all the really great men have been poor, or at least have begun life handicapped for want of money," continued the professor. "It looks like a decree of nature in order to give them that stimulus and grit necessary to carry them over all obstacles."

"I know from my own experiences," said Riche, "the wealthy man does not care for the things which only require his filling in a cheque to acquire; and to the poor man the most acute pleasure lies in anticipation."

"That is quite true," added the professor. "If one possessed all, everything would be mere discontent and disillusion. A surfeit of happiness is fatal. If there is nothing left to desire, there is everything to fear."

"Everything comes to the man who knows how to wait, but it is no inducement to wait, for no man wants everything," said Villebois. "Yes, he usually wants one thing in particular—just that one thing which he never gets, no matter how long he waits," said Marcel, laughing.

"Have you been to the comédie lately?" asked Renée of Madame Villebois who was sitting opposite to her,

looking extremely bored, and apparently utterly unable to follow the conversation.

"Yes, my dear, we went to see Yvette Guilbert, and she looked just too lovely in a dress specially created for her by Worth. The gown had a white sponge skirt with basque bodice of mulberry satin, and such a love of a bodice carried out in pink geranium brocaded crêpe. The right hip was swathed in black satin, and the left side had the material draped and caught up above the hem with a gold buckle and fringe of black silk. Then Mademoiseile Patel had a delightful three piece gown of pale green poplin, with a corsage of old filigree tissue showing just a touch of chêne ribbon on each side, while the neck ended in a creamy white lace ruffle. And, Renée dear, you should have seen her hat. It was a perfect poem. Just think of this:—Swathed crêpe de chine, with shaded flowers laid flat all along the rim, which she wore slightly tilted up at the back so as to show a pale green lining to match the gown.

"Oh! how lovely," exclaimed Renée, clapping her hands, "I which I had been there, but what I want most to hear is what the play was about, and how you liked it."

"Really, Renée, you should not ask such absurd questions. I was so taken up with the dresses that I forgot all about the play. By the way, I have just ordered a frock like Mademoiselle Patel's for myself. You must come with me and see it tried on."

"Of course, I like pretty frocks, what girl doesn't? But I like a good play ever so much more. I get so carried away with the acting that I never notice what the people wear so long as they are not out of harmony with the play or the music. I went to see Romeo and Juliet for the first time last Saturday, and you can't think how I enjoyed it. But I was so sorry for poor Juliet, and felt drawn to her right away. I even found myself weeping. That speech of Friar Lawrence to her was so fine that I learnt it off by heart as soon as I got home. Of course you know it—don't you, madame," she asked enquiringly.

"What was it again? I am afraid I have forgotten it," said madame, who had not the remotest idea of what Renée was talking about.

"You must remember, in order to stop her marrying Paris whom she loathed, the Friar gave her a drug to swallow, which he told her would leave her to all appearances dead, and then she would wake up again quite well as soon as the danger was over; you know, it runs like this:—

"Hold, then; go home, be merry, give consent
To marry Paris; Wednesday is to-morrow;
To-morrow night look that thou lie alone
Let not thy nurse lie with thee in thy chamber:
Take thou this vial being then in bed,
And this distilled liquor drink thou off:
When, presently through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour: for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease;
No warmth, no breath shall testify thou liv'st.
The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade
To paly ashes: thy eyes' windows fall
Like death, when he shuts up the day of Life.
Each part, deprived of supple government,
Shall, stiff and stark and cold, appear like death:
And in this borrowed likeness of shrunk death:
Thou shalt continue two-and-forty hours.
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep."

"I have often thought," interrupted Delapine who was listening most intently, "how I should like to leave this life, and then after a long sojourn in some other world, to wake up and find myself, like Juliet, once more at home. What countless problems one could solve, problems which have occupied the scientists for years. You cannot imagine, Renée, my intense longing to enter into the unknown and penetrate into the sealed mysteries of Nature. Alas, that exquisite joys should be denied to us, who are the first and last of all things, the Ultima Thule of evolution. I feel sometimes that in some extraordinary way I shall see it, Renée, but how, where, or when is more than I can conceive even in my wildest dreams."

So earnest and so wrapt was the young professor, and so apparently far away mentally while giving voice to his feelings, that a silence fell upon the assembled guests, and each one in turn leaned forward expectantly for what

was to follow. The first, however, to break the spell was Renée.

"Something tells me, in fact has been telling me for some time, that you will have your wish, dear professor. It was only a couple of nights ago that I dreamt——"

"Really, Renée, you ought to——"

"Oh, please let me, Madame Villebois, I was only going to say that I dreamt that you, professor, had left this world and had gone so far, far away, that you were so happy; and then I saw you lying down so peacefully and you were fast asleep, and when I went up and spoke to you, you never answered, and they told me that you were dead."

"Renée, how can you tell such things," cried Madame Villebois.

"Pray allow her, madame," interjected Riche, deeply interested himself, and finding support in the approved murmur around him.

"Oh, how I cried when they told me that," continued Renée, "and then a stranger came up and comforted me, and told me to dry my tears, and I should soon be quite happy again. I remember turning round to see who he was, but he had vanished, and then I woke up."

"My dear Renée," said Madame terribly shocked, "you must not let the professor put such dreadful things into your little head, such dreams and ideas are only fit for crazy philosophers and not for young ladies in good society like yourself."

"I am quite old enough to take care of myself," said Renée, a little huffed, especially as she felt the remark was meant as much for Delapine as for herself.

Madame Villebois shrugged her shoulders and became suddenly occupied in absorbing her crême de vanille glacée. She tried to think of something to say in reply, but on looking up she caught Delapine's eye, and noticed a peculiar smile on his lips which entirely dumfounded her, and caused her to make a sign that dinner was over, as her only way of escape from the dilemma.

Doctor Villebois removed his napkin from his chin, whereupon the other gentlemen did likewise, and taking the hint from the host, they all rose and bowed as the ladies left the room.

"Come, let us follow the ladies to the drawing-room," said Villebois after a short pause, for the doctor being an ardent admirer of the English, endeavoured, as far as his wife would permit him, to follow the English customs. "I like England," he would say, "because there every man is allowed the possibility of becoming a gentleman."

"Dreams are mysterious things" said Delapine, nervously fingering his cigarette, as soon as the party had reassembled in the next room. "Sometimes the cause is purely physiological. Overstudy, an attack of indigestion, some disturbance of the circulation, or even some physical pressure may cause a dream or a nightmare. But again, there are other dreams widely different from these which often prove prophetic. In these one's real consciousness may be lost in sleep while the subliminal self, the alter-ego which never slumbers nor sleeps, rises to the surface and speaks in no uncertain tones. The mind sees with the startling clearness as if in a vision. Voices are heard as if from another world, while strange figures, and scenes of unknown places slowly rise before the dreamer. I can vouch for this, many a time it has occurred to me. Only the other day I had worked in vain for many hours trying to solve a physical problem, when suddenly I fell asleep, and in a dream I saw the changes take place, and the formula plainly worked out before my eyes. So clear was it that when I awoke I was able to copy what my mental vision had seen, and on trying the experiment, I found, to my great delight and relief, that the problem was solved."

"My dear Delapine," said Riche, "you surely do not believe in clairvoyance, thought-reading, telepathy, apparitions, and all that sort of thing?"

"Why not? Are we to doubt a thing merely because it is contrary to our experience? If you had stated thirty years ago that you would be able to converse with a friend on board a ship nearly four hundred miles away, or that you could see a man's bones in his body, or photograph the contents of a sealed wooden box, would not everyone have declared you mad? And yet these things are being done every day. Why then should the things you have just mentioned be less credible? The evidence in their favour is overwhelming. There is hardly a family in the world but

contains some member who has experienced such things. Nay, I will go farther, there is not a tribe in any nation, at any period of the world's history which has not believed in these things. As Abraham Lincoln once said, 'You may fool all men some time, you may fool some men for all time, but you cannot fool all men for all time.' No, sir, the things men laugh at to-day as impossible will be improbable to-morrow, conceivable the day after, and a little later everyone accepts them as a matter of course, and wonders how people could ever have been such fools as to have doubted them."

"But what evidence is there," said Riche, "that these apparitions and marvellous phenomena really occur?" Why are séances held in the dark, or in merely a dull red light? If the performers were not tricksters could they not show these things in full daylight?"

"Permit me to ask you one question, my dear doctor," said Delapine. "Why do you develop your photographic plate in the dark and not in broad daylight?"

"The reason is obvious—the light would spoil the plate."

"Well then, might not the light interfere with the success of the phenomena of a séance in the same way? The one is just as logical as the other."

"Bravo, bravo," cried Renée, clapping her hands.

"Pardon me," said Riche, anxious to justify himself, "but what I complain of is the absence of any proof. What I demand is evidence that is unimpeachable and crushing before I can believe any of these things. All I ask for is some proof, some message purporting to come from the other world through spirits who will convince me that the dead live, and that they can communicate with us."

"You shall have it, you shall have it," cried the professor, rubbing his hands. "Have you ever heard the story of the Widow's Mite?"

"No" they all cried out together.

"Well, then, if you allow me, I will relate it to you."

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THE WIDOW'S MITE*

Der Feind den wir am tiefsten hassen,
Der uns umlagert schwarz und dicht,
Das ist der Uuverstand der Massen,
Den nur des Geistes Schwert durchbricht.
ARBEITER—*Marseillaise.*

'Ce n'est pas la vérité qui persuade les hommes,
Ce sont ceux qui la disent."—NICOLE.

Si non è vero, è molto ben trovato. Bruno (Eruici Furori) Part 2, Di 3.

"A FEW years ago I knew a lady in New York who was in the habit of giving gratuitous private sittings to her family and a few friends. The moment she became entranced in the curtained space in her room, one or more of her spirit controls would come and speak through her. Among them was a spirit named George Carrol, who, when alive had been a friend of the medium and some of her circle. He had a strong manly voice, and could be heard distinctly all over the room.

"One evening as her friends were sittting in the circle while the medium was entranced, the loud voice of George was heard, 'Has anyone here got anything belonging to the late Henry Ward Beecher?'

"'I have a letter in my pocket from Mr. Beecher's successor, if that is what you mean?' said a gentleman present.

*This story, which actually occurred in New York, is related in the late Dr. Isaac Funk's book "The Widow's Mite and other Psychic Phenomena," the leading facts of which are given here by his son's kind permission. Dr. Isaac Funk was the first editor of the famous Funk and Wagnall's Dictionary used throughout the English-speaking world, and he was celebrated for his brilliant intellect, precision of thought and the extreme accuracy of his statements.

"'No,' replied George, 'I am informed by another spirit present that Mr. Beecher is greatly concerned about an ancient coin "The Widow's Mite." This coin is out of place and ought to be returned. It has long been missing, and Mr. Beecher looks to you, Mr. Funk, to return it.'

"'But, my dear sir,' replied Mr. Funk, 'the only Widow's Mite I ever heard of was the one I borrowed many years ago for the purpose of making a copy for the Dictionary, and I am confident that I returned it.'

"'It has not been returned,' the voice replied. 'Go to your large iron safe and you will find it in a drawer under a lot of papers. It has been lost for many years, and Mr. Beecher says he wants it returned. That is all I can tell you.'

"The next day Mr. Funk called in the cashier and said 'Do you remember an old coin called "The Widow's Mite" which we used for the Dictionary?'

"'Yes, but it was sent back years ago.'

"'Are you sure of this?'

"'Absolutely certain.'

"'Well go and look in our large iron safe, and see if it is there.'

"'Of course I will do it, but I know it is useless, as I have turned out the contents hundreds of times.'

"Well, would you believe it, in a short time he returned and handed Mr. Funk an envelope containing two Widow's Mites, a smaller light coloured one and a black one. The envelope had been found in a little drawer in the iron safe under a lot of papers, where it had not been seen or disturbed for many years. In fact it had been entirely forgotten.

"Now, the curious part of the affair was that the smaller bright coin had been thought to be the genuine one, and had in consequence been used for the Dictionary. No one dreamt that the black one could be the genuine one. However, at the next séance when George began talking, I said to George, 'I find there are two coins in the envelope, tell me which of the two is the right one?'

"Instantly he replied, 'Why, the black coin of course.'

"Mr. Funk said, 'I am certain he is wrong there, I know that the black coin is spurious.'

"Then he asked George again, 'Can you tell me to whom I have to return it?'

"He replied, 'To a friend of Mr. Beecher's, I can't remember his name, but I have seen a picture of the college where he resides, and I know that it is in Brooklyn.'

"'What part of Brooklyn?' asked Mr. Funk.

"'On Brooklyn Heights.'

"'A gentlemen's or a ladies' school?'

"'A ladies' school.'

"On enquiry Mr. Funk found that a ladies' school was there, and that the Principal was a Professor Charles West.

"On consulting his old ledgers, he found that this was the very man to whom he had promised to return the coin.

"At a future sitting Mr. Funk said to George, 'Why could you not tell me his name right away?'

"'I don't know,' replied George, 'For some reason Mr. Beecher would not tell me. He said he was not concerned about the return of the coin, all he wanted was to give me a test which would convince me that there was a direct communication between the two worlds, and having succeeded in that, he cared nothing more about it.'

"After receiving this surprising answer, Mr. Funk sent the two coins again to the Mint, and received the reply that the director had consulted the assistant in the department of coins in the British Museum and was assured that the black coin was the genuine one.

"The most remarkable thing about the whole affair," added Delapine, "is that Mr. Funk happened to be the only man present at the séances who had ever heard of the Widow's Mite, and he had not the slightest conception of any of the facts which George had told him through the medium. The incident had occurred nine years before, and the whole history of the coin had not only passed completely out of his mind, but the fact, which George told him about it, was entirely new to him. Hence it was out of the question that the medium could have read his mind. How then are we to account for this revelation except by some intelligence on the other side of the Veil?"

"It must have been a put-up job—in fact a case of fraud, or else one of forgetfulness," said Duval.

"No, my dear sir, that is impossible. Forgetfulness

has nothing to do with it, as Mr. Funk was certain that his instructions to return the coin had been carried out to the letter. Why, even the owners of the coin never knew it was missing. Besides, no one except the cashier ever had access to the safe, and they had never known or even seen the medium."

"Ah, Pierre," replied Villebois, laughing, "confess that Delapine has fairly answered your objection."

"Well then," said Duval, nettled at the defeat of his argument, "it must have been a case of coincidence, that is certain."

"That explanation won't hold water. As far as I know this is the only private coin of its kind in the world, and, excepting a few numismatic specialists, no one knew of its existence. How could George have guessed the exact place where the person lived who had to receive the coin, when you consider the millions of likely places to choose from? And how could he have pointed out the exact spot where the coin was to be found, a spot where no one ever dreamt of looking for it? And lastly, when the two coins were found, why should George have named the black one, when no one in the circle except Mr. Funk was aware that there was a black one?"

"Bravo, bravo, professor," cried Riche, "these lawyers are very shrewd, but they lack scientific training. Ah! Monsieur Duval, you have met your match at last. Coincidence is clearly ruled out of the court in this case."

Pierre's pride would not allow him to admit the validity of Delapine's argument, although he felt its force.

"I have it," exclaimed Riche, "If it was not a fraud or coincidence there is only one thing left to explain it, *viz.*, telepathy or clairvoyance. Both Mr. Funk and the cashier knew that the coin had been borrowed, and it was the subconscious memory of one or the other of them which influenced the medium."

"If that be your explanation," said Delapine, "how do you overcome the difficulty that both Mr. Funk and the cashier were convinced that the coin had been returned? No person at the séance knew anything about the coin except Mr. Funk. The incident had been entirely forgotten by the latter for many years. Again, how could the

medium know from Mr. Funk's mind that he had not returned it, when he was certain that he had done so? And lastly you must remember that the medium had never seen the cashier, nor had she ever known of the existence of the drawer of the safe."

"No," cried Villebois, rising from the table and spreading out his hands with an emphatic gesture to the company, "I am convinced it is due to spirit intelligences. They find out everything. Mr. Beecher must have had a talk with George about it in the spirit world, and made him promise that he would see that the coin was sent back. Oh! it is as clear as daylight," he added, thumping the table with his fist.

"Ha! ha! really you are too funny, doctor," said Riche sarcastically. "Spirits! Oh mon Dieu! what are we coming to? In the twentieth century no sensible man believes in such things."

"Oh! how dreadful," cried Madame Villebois, "to imagine that there are spirits about. Really, I think it is most improper to talk about such things, especially before ladies. What would my adored mother have said to all this? If I had thought that my dear Adolphe had believed in spirits I would never have married him, never! Oh! what will my confessor say when I tell him?" And the good lady dabbed her eyes with her scented handkerchief, as she sat back in her chair perspiring.

"I think the professor and Villebois have clean gone off their heads," said Pierre sotto voce to Marcel. "Much learning hath made them mad."

"I am not so sure about that," replied Marcel. "Spiritualism, you know, is becoming quite fashionable, and it is no longer a heresy among the ladies to believe in it. I became quite lionised by the adorable creatures at a garden-party the other day when I quoted a passage from 'Le Livre des Esprits' by Allen Kardec, and they insisted on my relating my adventures in a haunted house near the Bois. It was very absurd of course, but they all believed it as if it were Holy Writ."

At this moment the door opened and Monsieur Payot was announced. The latter was a typical specimen of a well-to-do Bourgeois citizen. He possessed a large bald

head, smooth and polished like a billiard-ball, while his blue smiling eyes, and clean shaven double chin bespoke a man who seemed well pleased with the world and himself in particular. He was attired in faultless evening dress, with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour in his button-hole.

"Mille pardons, madame, but I was detained at the Crédit Lyonnais. I have just concluded a most satisfactory deal in the rubber market. So important that I was even compelled to defer the pleasure of being with you at dinner. Ma foi, you look more charming than ever, madame. I trust Renée is well. Ah, there you are, my dear."

M. Payot sat down and beamed with a smile peculiar to one who has succeeded in appropriating a large sum of money belonging to his fellow-citizens.

"Professor Delapine has just been telling us about a coin which was restored to its owner through the agency of spirits," said Villebois.

"Agency of Spirits, did you say? More likely agency of fiddlesticks," said Payot with a grunt. "My dear sir, don't worry your head over such things. All we have to concern ourselves with is to enjoy life, and make all the money we can, after providing dots for our daughters. Believe me, all else is nonsense. I'll never believe in spirits, or in anything that we can't explain or understand. Table rapping, mesmerism, thought-reading, telepathy, spirit photographs, materialisations, are all nonsense. Fraud, my dear sir, pure fraud, and nothing else. Masks, rubber bands, double exposures, phosphorised oil, invisible wires, knees and thumbs pushing the table along, table raps arranged beforehand, confederates hidden in the cabinets playing concertinas and ringing bells. You see I know all about them. I can do it—anyone can do it. I have exposed them all. Bah! I tell you these things are impossible." The great man wiped his face with a vast display of purple silk handkerchief, and sat down fully convinced that he had uttered the last word that could be said on the matter, and that he had made a most profound and impressive speech.

"He who pronounces anything to be impossible outside

the field of pure mathematics is wanting in prudence," said Delapine quietly.

"Whoever said such nonsense?" enquired Payot.

"François Arago," replied Delapine quietly with a comical smile.

Payot was silent, and a titter went round the room, as Arago was considered by common consent to have been the first scientist in France.

"But still, my dear professor, these things are after all merely a huge joke," said Riche.

The professor opened his blue eyes very wide and smiled.

"My dear doctor, a learned pedant who laughs at the possible comes very near being an idiot. To shun a fact purposely, and turn one's back upon it with a supercilious smile, is to bankrupt truth."

"Is that really your opinion?" asked Riche.

"It is, but they are not my words. Besides, do you not remember that the great English naturalist Huxley wrote 'I am unaware of anything that has the right to the title of an "impossibility" except a contradiction in terms. There are impossibilities logical but not natural. Walking on the water, turning water into wine, or raising the dead are plainly not impossibilities in this sense.'"

Renée's eyes sparkled as she looked up into his face with a sweet smile of approval.

The professor gave her a slight squeeze of the hand, and fell into a reverie of thought.

"But supposing, for the moment, that these phenomena were true," said Riche, "of what use are they? Surely spirits have something better to do than to waste their time in rapping tables, playing accordions or mandolins, ringing bells, or writing Greek sentences backwards, and answering all sorts of absurd questions. These things are only worthy of a mountebank, and not of serious people. Besides, these spirits never tell one anything new or worth knowing. If they informed us of their life on the other side, what they did, what they ate and drank, and how they amused themselves, I might think it worth while to examine the subject."

"Ah!" said Marcel, laughing, "what I should like them to tell me would be the name of the horse that is to win

the Grand Prix, or the Derby, to tell me the winning number in the State lottery, or to let me know what numbers to put my money on at Monte Carlo. Then, I confess, I would take up spiritualism with all my heart."

"I think spiritualism is just delightful," interposed Céleste. "I always believed that we never really die, and I know that I can feel what other people are thinking of without their saying a word. I do hope that the professor will show us some of these wonderful things. I am longing to know all about it."

"Céleste, I am shocked at you. You ought to know better," said Madame Villebois. "I am certain all this talk about spiritualism is very wicked. Father Pettavel told me so himself, and he attributes it all to the devil and his angels. The very thought that there may be spirits about, makes me positively afraid to go to sleep alone. Just suppose that they came and killed me in my bed, what would become of me then? I remember only the other night I heard strange, weird noises in my bedroom when I was in the dark, and saw gleaming eyes and dreadful forms prowl about. I called out to Adolphe to see what was the matter. Then a fearful spectral form with hollow eyes, and clothed in a sheet, came and stood over the end of my bed, and stretched out its thin, long, bony hands towards me, and bid me prepare to die. I was too afraid to call out, and had barely strength to cross myself and pray to the Blessed Virgin for aid. Thank heaven she heard me, and my prayer was answered, and the form slowly retreated and vanished, accompanied by the most fearful curses and groans. My confessor assured me that it was the Devil himself, and nothing but the efficacy of St. Geneviève's intercession to our Lady saved me."

Villebois burst into a loud laugh.

"Whatever are you laughing at?" said Madame, looking very shocked. "Was it not enough to frighten me to death?"

"Oh dear! Oh dear," said Villebois, almost choking with laughter. "My love, you saw nothing of the kind. I was at your side all the time, and you buried your head under the bedclothes and screamed with fright. I swear I saw nothing until I got up, when I found the whole cause

of the disturbance was due to a strange black cat which had got locked up by accident in Madame's wardrobe. It sprang out as I opened it, snarled, and jumped out on our bed, and then bolted out of the room. This was the sole origin of your ghostly spectre and gleaming eyes, while the awful groans you thought you heard were the squeals which came from the little beast as I struck it with my cane when it fled."

Everyone roared with laughter, and Madame Villebois became very red and confused, and discreetly held her tongue.

A short silence ensued, and then Delapine awoke out of his reverie.

"The most astonishing thing about psychic phenomena," said Delapine, "is that nearly all men are profoundly ignorant of the very elements of the subject. The man in the street laughs at them, and the scientific man refuses to examine them, and yet the amount of literature which has been written on the subject is prodigious. These phenomena have been studied, examined, and recorded under strictly scientific conditions for upwards of fifty years, and every man who examines them carefully with an impartial mind, however sceptical he might be when he commenced his investigations, invariably becomes assured of their reality. But do not ask me to explain the phenomena. I confess I know nothing of their cause. As Fontanelle says 'It shows a great lack of intelligence to find answers to questions which are unanswerable.' I am like Faust who exclaims: —

> "I've studied now Philosophy,
> And Jurisprudence, Medicine,
> And even—alas! Theology,
> From end to end with labour keen;
> And here, poor fool! with all my lore
> I stand no wiser than before.

"Nevertheless I have convinced myself that these extraordinary phenomena are absolutely true, and by your leave, ladies and gentlemen, I will demonstrate a very few of them, and next time that we meet I trust I will show you some far more striking experiments, but that is only

possible when I have convinced you sufficiently to have complete faith in me, otherwise the phenomena will not succeed. It is remarkable," he continued, "that whenever anybody makes a discovery, or an invention, everyone laughs him to scorn, and derides him either as an impostor or a madman. When Galileo looked through his telescope, and saw the mountains and valleys of the moon, all the people jeered at him. When he directed the instrument on to the planet Venus, and observed its phases, which demonstrated the fact that the planet revolved round the sun, the philosophers refused to look through his telescope. When in 1786 Jouffroy constructed a steamboat, he ascended the Saône from Lyons to the island of Barbe, he presented a petition to the Academy of Science, and requested the Minister of the Interior to take over his boat, but they all refused even to look at his invention. Seventeen years later Fulton ascended the Seine in his newly invented steamer and the Government officials condescended so far as to be present, but they paid no attention to it, and allowed the poor man to go away unnoticed and neglected. He went away almost heart-broken to the United States, and there made the fortune of thousands of people.

"Professor Graham Bell went all round New York in the vain endeavour to sell a half interest in his newly invented telephone for 2,000 dollars. Everyone thought that he was mad, and he could not find a single person in the whole city who would risk £400 on his invention. To-day the Bell Telephone Co. has a capital amounting to millions of dollars, and the half interest which he offered would have made the lucky purchaser one of the richest men in the world.

"When an Englishman once offered to light the streets of London by means of coal-gas conducted through pipes, everyone said that he was mad, and the Chancellor (Lord Brougham), writing to a friend in Edinburgh, said, 'There is an idiot here in London who says that he can light the city with coal-gas conducted through a tube.' Sydney Smith even asked the inventor whether he would not like to store his gas in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral?

"But before long all the streets of every capital in Europe were lit up by this very means.

"Galvani happened to hang some skinned frogs on an iron railing, with the intention of making them into soup, and, as chance would have it, tried the experiment of connecting the spinal column with the nerve of their legs by means of a bent wire made of tin and copper. Then he noticed that the legs twitched violently every time he made the connection, although they had been dead for some hours. He had no sooner published the account of what had happened than he became the laughing stock of Bologna; and no one thought sufficient of the experiment to repeat it for himself, and yet Galvani had discovered electricity, the greatest and most universally employed force that we know of. And if I tell you of this new force which I hope to exhibit to you some day, perhaps you will go away laughing at me, and saying, 'We don't understand what you are saying, and therefore you are talking nonsense.' If I 'will' to take this weight and raise it with my arm above my head, my will moves matter and overcomes gravity. What is the force which enables me to do it? You do not know. Neither do I, and yet no one in this room doubts that I have done it, because everyone of us performs a similar act a thousand times a day.

"Physiologists will tell you that every object we see forms a little image on a nervous layer at the back of our eyes, but they cannot tell you how that image is perceived by the mind, nor can they explain why the image appears so large—in fact life size—since the image on the retina (at the back of the eye) is a mere speck compared with the size of the image as it appears to us.

"People tell us that it is impossible that one body can act on another at a distance without anything connecting them. It is altogether as incomprehensible as a miracle, and yet we can see it happening every day of our lives. We call it gravitation, and imagine that by giving it a name we know all about it. But you cannot explain it, neither can I, and yet there is nothing in spiritualistic phenomena more wonderful, more incomprehensible than this. Why then should you take the one for granted, and absolutely refuse even to examine the other? Is it just to assert that

a man must be bereft of his senses who believes in it, and has the courage to announce it publicly? You, my dear Monsieur Payot, who appear to know everything, assert that all the phenomena are the result of fraud, and so easy to perform that anyone can imitate them, you might give us physicists credit for some little amount of common sense. You seem to imagine that we, who have all our lives trained our faculties to observe minutely and to rest satisfied with nothing until we have examined it from every conceivable point of view, and reflected upon all possible source of error, can be deceived by tricks that a six-year-old child could see through in a minute. When I began my psychical investigations I not only visited all the conjuring exhibitions in Paris, but I underwent a course of instruction from Samuel Bellachini, Signor Bosco, Maskelyne and Devant, and Harry Kellar, besides mastering the works of Robert Houdin and Professor Hoffmann that I might make myself practically acquainted with every possible trick that is performed on the stage. But all these great conjurers assured me that with all their resources and apparatus they were unable to repeat the psychical phenomena which I have both witnessed and performed myself from time to time."

"Well, sir," replied Payot, visibly nettled by this speech, "since you are so clever, let me see some proof of your conjuring power."

"I am not accustomed to give exhibitions of conjuring either in public or private," replied Delapine with some warmth, "but since you have challenged me I will for once take up the gauntlet in my defence and convince you that I am not uttering idle words. Would you oblige me, Monsieur Payot, with the loan of your watch?"

Payot caught hold of his watch chain to remove it, but to his horror and amazement no watch appeared. It had gone.

"Oh, dear," he cried, "some one must have stolen it as I was coming here, as I remember perfectly well taking the time only a few minutes before I entered this house. It was a presentation watch, and a very valuable one too. My dear Villebois, will you be good enough to telephone to the police at once. I cannot afford to lose it," he added, looking very distressed.

"Do you know the number of the watch?" asked Delapine, "as that is most important. In fact I don't see how the police will ever be able to identify it otherwise, seeing how many thousands of gold watches there are in Paris."

"No, I can't say I do, but the watchmaker would be able to tell me."

"That is impossible," said Delapine. "The watch was made in Geneva, and the manufacturer has been dead some years now."

"I remember now," said Payot, "you are quite right. I sent it to Geneva to be repaired and I received a letter back saying that the maker had died two years before. But how Delapine knows these facts passes my comprehension. I am certain, now I reflect, that a thief snatched it out of my pocket, as I was in the act of stepping out of my carriage. In fact, I feel sure I could recognise the man if I were to meet him again. What a fool I was not to take the number of the watch; for, as the professor rightly says, it affords the only clue to its recovery."

"That is quite easy," said Delapine quietly. "The number is B40479, and the name of the maker is Bréguet."

"How can I prove that you are correct?" cried Payot, uncertain whether to be angry with the professor for making fun of him, or to be nonplussed at his uncanny knowledge.

"Nothing is more simple," answered Delapine. "My dear Villebois, would you mind touching the bell?"

"François," said Delapine as the servant entered the room, "will you be good enough to go into the spare bedroom, and on a chair near the window you will see a tall hat with a gold-mounted cane. Look inside the hat and bring me what you find there."

In a couple of minutes the servant returned carrying a gold watch which he handed to Delapine.

"Is this your watch?" asked Delapine, as he passed it to Payot with a bow.

"Yes," he replied, looking very astonished. "It looks like my watch."

"That is not sufficient proof. Pray observe the number and read it aloud."

"B40479," replied Payot, more mystified than ever.

"Well then, it must be your watch. Be good enough to put it in your pocket, and take care not to lose it again."

"That I shall never do," replied Payot. "I am much sharper than people give me credit for."

Delapine's eyes twinkled with amusement, which did not escape Payot's notice.

"Well, I will make a present of it to anyone who can take it away again without my being aware of it," Payot replied testily, as he felt his amour propre wounded at the professor's display of mirth.

"Be careful what you say. I have a long memory," said Delapine, laughing.

Payot examined his watch carefully, and opened the case to make sure that the works had not been spirited away.

"This is the work of Satan. I am sure no one can believe in God who does such things," said Madame Villebois.

"Do you believe in God?" asked young Duval with a sudden inspiration, hoping to depreciate him in Renée's eyes.

"No," replied Delapine, "I do not, because I cannot. My conscience will not permit me."

"But surely you believe in a Divine Being?" replied Villebois, looking very shocked.

"That too I cannot accept."

"Oh! what a dreadful man," cried Madame Villebois, absolutely horrified. "My dear," she whispered to her husband, "how could you invite an infidel to our house who does not believe in anything?"

"On the contrary, madame, I believe in many things," said Delapine, who overheard her remark, "although, unlike most people, I claim no credit for doing so. But one thing we must all admit, whatever we believe cannot alter the facts. People believe in a God because it acts as a Deus ex machina, to account for the difficulties which surround them on every side, and dispenses with their need of thinking. Besides, it flatters their vanity when they are told that God made man in His own image. Whereas, as a matter of fact, it is the other way about. Man made God in Man's own image. The idea of a God

is based on that of a gigantic man, or at least on something which has dimensions, and possesses certain human attributes and passions on a vast scale, although if we were to judge by the way the average person prays, his God would not make a decent sized man. On the other hand philosophy convinces me that the Eternal can have no shape, or attributes, or passions, such as we can conceive of. A Divine Being is open to the same objection. A Being implies a material form—something which exists. Now the Eternal cannot be anything which exists, at least not in the same sense that is attached to matter as we know it, since everything which exists must have had a beginning, and therefore cannot be eternal. Take a bucketful of the ocean, you have water. Take a sample of the atmosphere and you have air. Take a handful of space and you have Mind.

"This eternal Mind is the 'Fons et Origo' of everything. It is the source of all energy and all matter. It alone is eternal. All else is evanescent and unsubstantial. Did not Virgil make that profound remark:—

"Mens agitat Molem et magna corpore miscet."[1]

"Do we not find Marian Capella at the beginning of the Christian era mentioning Mind as being the fifth or fundamental element? Consider these facts well, for they form the key to all spiritualistic phenomena. At the end of the eighteenth century we find the great Russian poet Derchavin uttering the same idea in the following words of which I give the translation:—

"O Thou Eternal Mind whose presence bright,
All space doth occupy, all motion guide;
Unchanged through Time's all-devastating flight—
Thou only God, there is no God beside.
Being above all beings Mighty One,
Whom none can comprehend and none explore;
Who fills existence with Thyself alone,
Embracing all, supporting, ruling o'er;
Being whom we call God and know no more.

[1] "Mind sets matter in motion, and permeates all matter."
VIRGIL.—*Æneid*, Bk. vi.

"Research in its Divine philosophy,
May measure out the ocean deep,
May count the stars, or the sun's rays;
But God, for Thee there is no weight nor measure.
None can search Thy counsels infinite and dark.
Reason's brightest spark though multiplied by millions,
And arrayed in all the glories of divinest thought;
Is but an atom in the balance weighed against Thy greatness
Is a cypher wrought against Infinity.

"And what am I then? Nought!
Nought, but the effluence of Thy light divine,
Pervading worlds hath reached my spirit too;
Yes! In my spirit doth Thy spirit shine,
As shines the sunbeam in the drop of dew.
Thy chains the unmeasured Universe surround
Upheld by Thee, by Thee inspired with breath,
Thou the beginning with the end hath bound,
And beautifully mingled life and death.

"As sparks shoot upwards from the fiery blaze
So suns are born—so worlds spring forth from thee,
And as the spangles from the sunny rays
Shine round the glittering snow,
So heaven's bright army echoes with Thy praise.
What shall we call them—globes of crystal light?
A glorious company of golden streams,
Lamps of celestial ether burning bright.
Suns lighting systems with their glorious beams
But Thou to these are as the noon to night.

"What are ten million worlds compared with thee?
And what am I then? Nought,
Nought! But I live and on hope's pinions fly
Eager towards Thy presence,
For in Thee I live and dwell—aspiring high
Even to the threshold of Thy Divinity,
I am, O God! and surely Thou must be!"

"Bravo!" cried Riche, "I for one pronounce you not guilty of the charge of atheism."

Payot felt that Delapine had decidedly the best of the argument, and being utterly unable to reply made an excuse to go.

"My dear Villebois," said he "you cannot think how I have enjoyed this pleasant evening, but I have an important engagement with the Minister of Finance, and time

presses," and so saying he proceeded to pull out his watch. A cold shiver went through him. A gold watch was clearly there, but it was an open-faced one, whereas his was a hunter.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, "my watch has gone, and someone has left his own in its place."

Everyone immediately felt for his own watch.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Marcel, "here's a funny thing. Why, I've got Payot's watch fastened on to my chain. Here's the number right enough, B40479. Look!" he exclaimed, "my gold seal has gone too, and my toothpick as well. Oh! Oh!! Oh!!!" he cried in three different tones.

"Yes," added Payot, "and what is far more serious, my pocket-book has disappeared, and it contains 10,000 frs. in Billets de Banque."

"And now my wedding ring has gone," sobbed Madame Villebois. "Oh you wicked, wicked man," she cried to Delapine, "I shall have you put in prison for this."

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear madame. It is your husband who is the thief, not I."

"What do you mean, sir!" cried Villebois indignantly, hardly knowing what he was saying.

"I can see it from here, papa," said Céleste, laughing. "It is hanging on your watch-chain."

There it was sure enough, and Villebois, looking very foolish, was obliged to release his watch before he could slip off the ring, which he handed to Madame.

"Villebois, mon ami," said Delapine, "will you oblige me by ringing the bell once more?"

"François," said Delapine solemnly, as the butler entered the room, "I am sorry to have to say it, but it is my duty to accuse you of stealing Monsieur Payot's pocket-book containing bank-notes to the amount of ten thousand francs."

"Me, sir!" replied François in astonishment. "Oh! monsieur, that is impossible."

"It is not impossible," replied Delapine severely. "You have it secreted on your person. I know it. Pierre, please lock the door, and put the key in your pocket. François, I must request you to allow Monsieur Payot to search you. If you refuse, I shall at once send for the police."

François grew deadly pale, and falling on his knees swore by the Holy Virgin and all the Saints that he was innocent.

Delapine appeared insensible to his appeal, and merely said, "Monsieur Payot, proceed."

The financier at once commenced to search the butler's pockets, while Delapine stood behind him and held his arms. Sure enough the first article he pulled out was the pocket-book. "Now, Monsieur Payot, be good enough to let me see whether all the notes are there. I wish to convince myself," said Delapine. And taking the pocket-book out of Payot's hands, he rapidly counted the notes, and subtracting one of them said to François, "I acquit you of all blame. It was I who did it in order to convince Monsieur Payot of my powers. This gentleman offered to make a present of his watch to anyone who could take it away from him without his being aware of it. I have succeeded, but I refuse to take his watch. Still, as I have been the cause of a great deal of unpleasantness to my esteemed friend François, I feel sure Monsieur Payot will not object if I present you with this note."

Whereupon the professor handed the butler one of the hundred-franc notes, and shaking him by the hand, told him he was a thorough good fellow, and at his request Pierre unlocked the door, and bowed the bewildered and delighted man out.

"One moment, Monsieur Payot, I percieve you also are a thief. If you will be good enough to put your hand in your left-hand waistcoat pocket you will find our friend Marcel's gold toothpick and seal. Pray hand them back to him with his watch, and he will give you yours in return."

The financier having at length recovered all his personal effects, shook hands all round, and bolted as fast as his legs would carry him, fully convinced that Delapine was the Devil.

"Well," said Delapine, "are you satisfied now?"

Villebois and his guests looked at one another in mute astonishment, much too bewildered to say anything.

"Another evening, with your permission," said Delapine, "I will show you some experiments of an entirely different character."

CHAPTER IV

PAYOT AND DUVAL

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men,
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promised joy."

BURNS.

IF you turn past the church of Notre Dame de Lorette and walk towards the corner of the Rue La Bruyère, you will notice a charming detached villa on the right with a little garden all to itself shut in by ornamental railings.

It was the third evening after the events related in the last chapter, when a military man might have been seen in his cabriolet leaving the elaborately wrought iron gates of the villa, and directing his coachman to proceed to No—Boulevard Haussmann near the Arc de Triomphe.

It had been raining heavily all the afternoon, and the foot passengers could be seen picking their way between the omnibuses, and endeavouring to avoid the mud which splashed up on all sides. The cafés and restaurants were beginning to light up, and the little marble tables outside became more and more crowded with guests. A crowd had assembled in one of the small side streets, listening to a trio of musicians who were playing outside one of those curious little café-restaurants only patronised by a select fraternity of Bohemians who meet nightly year in and year out to chat and play dominoes, and take their evening meal at 1 fr. 50 c., wine inclusive, with clock-like regularity. A woman who had evidently been trained as a public singer, and who had known better days, was singing one of those exquisite airs of Charles Gounod with a voice which still

bore traces of its former richness. But the scene was unheeded by the occupant of the carriage, who was mentally rehearsing the manœuvres which would give him the most favourable position in the mimic campaign which he was about to undertake.

At length the driver stopped opposite the house indicated, and his fare alighted, enquired if Monsieur Payot were at home, as he handed in a card bearing the name of General Duval. A footman in livery showed him into a large hall decorated with old carved oak furniture and a perfect armoury of mediæval weapons and shields interspersed with rows of marvellous Delft and Sèvres ware.

"Ah! mon Général, delighted to see you," said Payot, with a beaming smile as he entered the room. "I am quite alone this evening, so we can have a chat tête-à-tête."

The person addressed was a pompous little man, rather corpulent, with a double chin, and immensely impressed with his own importance. He had a bald head, and a white moustache with the ends drawn out to a great length, and so twisted and waxed that they resembled a pair of skewers. This, together with the fact that his eyes were chronically inflamed and bulging with a constant tendency to roll, gave him an aspect of terrible ferocity. He was a bon vivant, and possessed a high reputation for his judgment of wines, an opinion which was always taken as final in any dispute at the clubs. He was in his element when reviewing his troops, where he might be seen cantering up and down in a state of great excitement, spurring his horse to make it rear and plunge to the terror and amazement of the nursemaids who formed a rear guard with their perambulators. One would have imagined that his men were all stone deaf judging by the way he addressed them in tones of thunder. In fact he always gave his hearers the impression that he was in a towering passion. For admiration and glory he had an insatiable thirst, which was only equalled by his greed for gold. Indeed it was a common joke amongst his officers that in the next campaign he would be found defending himself to the last drop of his blood with his drawn salary in his hand. Notwithstanding his absurd vanity, he was, like all French officers, brave to the core, and fearless as a lion, and for this reason alone

he was adored by his men, who felt that he would prove his metal and lead them on to victory no matter what odds were against them when they were all but defeated, and leading a forlorn hope.

"Well, mon ami, how has the world been treating you since I saw you last?" said Duval père.

"So, so, but I must confess I have hardly recovered yet from the shock I got at Villebois' house the other night. Didn't you hear of it? Well you must know that fellow, Delapine, was staying with them as a guest, and he got into a discussion about spiritualism and all that sort of nonsense. Amongst other things he gave out that he was a conjurer, and so I thought I would put his powers to the test. Whereupon he spirited away my watch, and it was found in my hat in the spare bedroom. When I got it back again I offered to make him a present of it, if he could take it away again without my knowledge.

"After a while all sorts of strange things happened. Rings and pencil-cases, watches and pocket-books changed hands all over the room. Everybody lost something, and found something else in its place. I lost my pocket-book containing bank notes to the tune of 10,000 frs., and in some mysterious manner it was found in the butler's breast pocket. I am certain it was not the result of pure conjuring, since the professor never came near me, and yet all the things I had in my pockets vanished, and were found in other people's pockets. I feel convinced that he is in league with the devil, and practices the black art. I really think he should be exposed. He is certainly a most undesirable man to have anything to do with. It seemed to me also that he has some sort of sinister spell over my daughter Renée, and I feel it must be put a stop to at once."

"Most certainly," replied Duval, delighted to think that the game was playing into his hands so nicely. "We must put our heads together and see how we can get Villebois to forbid him to come near his house again. It is very curious that you should mention this subject, because it is closely related with the object of my visit, my dear Payot.

"Of course you are aware what a surprising future is opening up for my son Pierre. He is rapidly rising in his profession, and is sure to make his mark wherever he goes.

I think he would make an ideal husband, he is so extremely amiable, so attentive and so thoughtful. Besides, I shall leave him nearly all my property, which amounts to considerably over a million francs. Now, it seems to me that it would be mutually to our benefit if we could arrange a match between your daughter and my son. I have great influence with the minister of commerce, and I can give you private information as to the Government's policy, so that you can manipulate your shares to the greatest advantage in the Bourse, before the agents or the public know anything about it. In this way you will be able to make a grand coup without any risk of being found out."

Payot slowly raised his gold-rimmed pince-nez and adjusted them to his nose with great deliberation, fixing his eyes on the General with a cynical smile.

"Hum, hum," he muttered half aloud. "Renée is a great prize, mon cher Duval. This is only her first season, and she has already had three proposals from young wealthy men in good positions. Why she has refused them all is a mystery to me, considering what very advantageous offers they all were."

"I am not in the least surprised at that," replied Duval, "seeing that my son had known her some months, and has already permitted her to see that cupid has severely wounded him with his shaft. A chance, mon ami, to have a husband like my son can only come to her once in a lifetime, n'est-ce pas?"

The eyeglass came up again as slowly and cautiously as before. "Listen, mon ami," said Payot, "Monsieur Ribout, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, is, I understand, about to raise a loan for the new Morocco-Tunisian Railway. Do you think you can get me the concession for flotation?"

"My dear Payot, you anticipate me. I have it in my portfolio?"

"What! Do you mean to say that you actually have it here, in your portfolio?" cried Payot in a shrill tremor of delight.

"C'est vrai, mon ami. Just wait a moment and I will show it you. Here it is, now we can arrange these things beautifully."

Payot rubbed his hands together in a fever of delight, while his eyes sparkled with impatient greed, as he stretched out his hand to clasp the precious document.

"Stop, stop, mon vieux, there are a few, just a few little preliminaries to arrange before I give it up to you. In the first place I must ask you to sign this little paper, undertaking to pay me twenty-five per cent. of the net profits which you make over the concession. A mere form, of course, but between friends it is always as well to attend to these little details."

The eyeglass went up again with more deliberation than ever, and Payot calmly surveyed as much of him as was visible above the table "What is his little game now?" he muttered to himself.

"And now," continued Duval, "you have only to sign this, and give me your solemn promise that Renée shall marry my son, and the consession is yours."

Payot sat still, playing an imaginary tune upon the table, evidently thinking intently.

"Twenty-five per cent. is rather a high price to pay, mon vieux. Let me see," said he, casting up the figures in his head. "The concession is for a capital of 45,000,000 frs., and my profit on the deal will be 2,000,000 frs. Then there are certain deductions to be made. Yes, to be sure," he muttered to himself. 750,000 frs., and 200,000 frs., and 50,000 frs., that leaves a million francs, and twenty-five per cent. on a million is 250,000 frs. Two hundred and fifty thousand francs is a lot of money to give away," said Payot, nervously playing with his wine glass.

"But you see what you are getting for it," said Duval, "Seven hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"A mere bagatelle compared with my daughter. Why, I am simply giving her away, sir—giving her away!" and he heaved a sigh as if he had been asked to sign away his birthright.

"Well then," said Duval, anxious to strike while the iron was hot, "we will call it a bargain," and without any further to-do he pushed the paper over to Payot to sign.

Payot seeing that further haggling was useless, took his pen and mechanically signed the document.

Duval rang the bell.

"What do you want?" cried Payot, wondering why Duval should take upon himself the ordering of his servants.

"Oh, it's all right, mon ami," said Duval, as the butler entered. "I merely wanted someone to witness our signatures."

While the butler was signing the document under Duval's directions it suddenly struck Payot that this was rather sharp practice on Duval's part. But it was too late to interfere now, as the General had neatly folded up the paper and put it inside his portfolio.

"My dearest friend," said Duval, "I see you were a little surprised at my summoning the butler, but it was a mere habit of mine, my dear sir, a mere habit. As an officer I become so accustomed to ringing the bell and issuing orders, that it becomes part of my nature," and he reached out his hand to Payot with the most bewitching smile that he could command on the spur of the moment. "With our two families united by marriage, my dear comrade, we shall be able to carry out some magnificent projects."

"I admit the combination will be very advantageous to our interests, considering the hostile cliques we have to contend with on every side. I am a little, just a little bit afraid that that fellow Dalapine may prove an obstacle to our schemes," Duval rejoined with a broad grin which displayed a magnificent set of false teeth.

"I confess, my dear General, I share your views. His impudence, his brazen effrontery, and most of all the extraordinary power he seems to exercise over other people's minds, will not render my task an easy one."

"Oh, you leave him to me," said Duval. "My knowledge of strategy will enable me to outmanœuvre him at every turn. It will be mere child's play to me."

"I suppose that Renée will consent to marry Pierre?" added Duval after a slight pause.

"My dear General, how can you ask such a question? Why, Renée adores Pierre—she can't help it. No girl could withstand his attractions, especially when she knows

how he worships her. How could any girl be insensible to his charms with his wealth and his talents? Don't you worry yourself on that score."

"But suppose that she loves Delapine?"

"Oh, oh! you are too funny, mon Géneral. What an absurd idea! What on earth can Renée find to admire in a mad fossil like Delapine? Besides, he is as poor as a church mouse; he has nothing in the world beyond his pittance from the Government—a mere fifteen thousand francs a year. Why, it would hardly keep me in wines and cigars. I give my little girl credit for more sense than that. Besides, supposing she did commit the folly of refusing your son, when I come to put the situation before her, her natural common-sense would soon bring her round to my way of thinking. A little well-timed severity, a few threats on my side followed by a burst of tears on hers, and then she will surrender unconditionally."

"No, no," replied Duval, "I have no fear on that score whatever. You can have no possible objection to my retaining the concession until the engagement is announced. It will act as a kind of fillip to you, and besides, it will be the most potent inducement to Renée to alter her mind, and obey you, should she have any affection for Delapine or any other man. By the way, mon ami," added Duval, seeing that Payot was about to reply, "this Tokay is really quite excellent. It has a surprisingly fine bouquet," and he emptied his glass at a draught. "Hullo! it is already eight o'clock, and I have an appointment at the Elysée with the Minister of Finance in half an hour. Au revoir, mon ami, au revoir," and so saying he shook hands, and seizing his hat and portfolio, left the house before the bewildered Payot could collect his senses and remonstrate.

"Confound that fellow," said Payot, shaking his fist at the retreating carriage of the General, "what did he mean by running away with that concession? Does he take me for a robber? I will pay you out for that, you old villain. I will be even with you yet, see if I don't! Still, it does not matter much after all, I know he is as anxious as I am that the deal should go through, as he knows that he can no more do without me than I can do without him. Yes,

yes, it makes no difference. We must work together, although he is a rascal, and a damned rascal too."

Payot was a widower past middle age. Thirty years had passed since he had left his home near Belfort to enter the military college of St. Cyr. Clever, handsome, full of ambition and energy, the young man was the pride of his mother's heart, and it was with great misgiving that she allowed him to leave the paternal roof.

At college his talents soon prepared the way for promotion, whilst his open frankness and engaging manners made him popular with all his comrades.

At St. Cyr, he made the acquaintance of young Jaques Duval, an acquaintance which soon ripened into friendship, and the two comrades in arms became inseparable.

During the Franco-Prussian war Duval gained rapid promotion, and for his gallant conduct at Mars-la-Tour he was gazetted General. Payot was carried off the field in the same battle, having been struck on the head by a fragment of shell. For some weeks he hung between life and death, and had it not been for the unceasing care and attention of his nurse, he must have died. The devotion of this young girl soon awoke a response in his heart, and during his convalescence he declared his love for her, and was accepted with equal fervour.

Soon after leaving the hospital he retired from the army, married, and went into business.

Two years later his wife bore him a daughter. Nothing could surpass the affection of this child for her parents, and especially for her mother. As Renée grew up, she became the darling of the parish. Absolutely unconscious of any superiority due to her position and wealth, she would mingle in the games of the poorest children. Any day she might be seen teaching the little girls to trim their hats with woodbine, to play puss-in-the-corner, or hide-and-seek. Sometimes she would take them into the woods to hear the cuckoo, or the nightingale. It was entirely through her entreaties that her father induced the organist of the parish church to give singing lessons in the village choir, and she herself practised the violin that she might be able to give concerts to the villagers, who would assemble in an old barn and join lustily in the singing. There was one

old fellow in particular named Caillot; he lived quite alone in a little cottage and was unable to work at a trade owing to a defect in his eyes which rendered him nearly blind. He picked up a scanty pittance by playing the violin, which he did with uncommon skill. Wherever she was you would invariably find the little man playing or singing, and he was of such a cheerful disposition that he got the nickname of "Le Pinson" (Chaffinch). His admiration for Renée amounted to worship, and the ne plus ultra of happiness was when Renée and her governess would consent to enter his little room and play a duet with him on the violin.

To see the little Chaffinch chirping and hustling around, placing a soft cushion on a chair for Mam'selle Renée to sit on, and looking through his well-thumbed collection of music for some piece he knew she was especially fond of, was a proof of the most intense devotion. So absorbed and wrapped up was he in attending to Mam'selle Renée that the poor governess had to find a chair for herself as best she could, and it invariably ended in Renée refusing to play a note until Caillot had found a cushion and chair for her also.

Whenever a marriage took place in the village, the Chaffinch was certain to be sent for, and Renée insisted on being allowed to deck him out with gay ribbons in the presence of the bride and bridegroom. "Viola, mon p'tit Papa Pinson," she would say with a smile, "you look the handsomest man in the village to-day, and here is a new five-franc piece which I persuaded my father to give me, because I told him I wanted you to put on your brightest smile. N'est ce pas, p'tit papa?" But one day the man fell ill, and was unable to earn his rent. Poor little man, he was all alone, and might have died of hunger and neglect if his illness had not by a pure accident reached the ears of Renée.

"What!" she exclaimed when she heard the tale, "do you mean to say that they are going to turn mon pauvre Pinson out of his house, because he is unable to pay his rent? Oh! my poor Caillot!"

In spite of her mother's remonstrances she emptied the contents of her money-box into her pocket, and ran out

of the house as fast as she could to his lodgings all alone. Alas! all her little savings were not enough to meet the rent which had accumulated for some weeks. What could she do? A happy thought struck her, and she went the round of the village, begging from the doctor, the priest, and the notary, until she had collected enough, not only to pay off the arrears of rent, but to purchase a few comforts besides.

"My poor little Pinson, what would you do without your Renée?"

No wonder she was popular owing to her intense sympathy for others, her exquisite eyes beaming with love and tenderness, and yet withal sparkling with fun, her smile for all, and her light girlish step. No wonder the poor looked upon her as something "outre tombe," an incarnate angel sent to minister unto them.

Anyone daring to speak disparagingly of Mam'selle Renée would have done so at the risk of his life. A fine horse-woman, she usually accompanied her father in the chase, and many a time she would run a race across country with him and the squire's son at break-neck pace. Ah, those were halcyon days indeed.

One day when she was about eighteen years old her mother was suddenly taken ill with pneumonia, and died after a short illness. The happiest home in all France speedily became the most tragic and miserable. A change came over her father. The injury to his head received years before on the battlefield, suddenly became rekindled by the shock and grief at his wife's death, and from being an ideal husband he grew morbid, avaricious, selfish, and dead to all affection. He seemed at times to have forgotten the very existence of his daughter. Renée bore up as long as she could, but at length Dr. Villebois, who for years had been the family physician, insisted on taking her to his home as she seemed to be rapidly pining away. It was here that she met Delapine for the first time. The awe, akin to worship, which a clever, high-spirited young girl sometimes perceives for a man possessing talent of a remarkable order—a feeling by the way which is entirely independent of age—soon changed into one of deep and lasting love, and although she succeeded in

concealing it from him and all the world, her womanly instinct soon told her that Delapine had the same feeling for her, and secretly worshipped the very ground she trod on.

Had they lived in the Middle Ages and had she been condemned to die at the stake, Delapine would no more have hesitated to take her place at the burning pile, than he would have thought twice about giving all the money he had in his pocket to a poor student to purchase his class-books.

Delapine possessed that extraordinary magnetic power which attracts certain people with a force that defies all reason to explain. Shakespeare expounds it in immortal language in Romeo and Juliet. Goethe observed it and gave it a name "Wahlverwandschaft," or elective affinity. We see it turning up in the most unexpected places; in the palace, the cottage, the prison, nay even on the scaffold. Myth and lore teem with it. History is ennobled by it. It is the same spirit which knit the souls of David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, Dante and Beatrice, Hermann and Dorothea, Catarina and Camoens. This intense affection is the exact opposite of that passion which is popularly called love. The former has nothing to do with sex, the latter is merely a sexual impulse. The former is the most unselfish thing in the world, the latter is entirely selfish. The former is purely spiritual, the latter of the earth, earthy.

True love remains when everything else has perished, the latter dies, or has wings and flies away.

"Tout ce que touche l'amour est sauvé de la mort."*

It was the supreme development of this spiritual power which we call love in its purest and highest sense, which led St. Paul to express himself in that exquisite ode to charity, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. It is the fruit of this spirit which has produced the martyrs, the heroes, and the golden deeds of this and every age.

* * * * * *

The next day after the remarkable conversation between the General and Payot, Renée was busy writing in her boudoir, when she heard a knock at the door.

* Romain Rolland.

A servant entered bearing a note which ran as follows :—

MY DEAR RENEE,

I should be very much obliged if you would come and see me at my house. I have some important news for you. I shall expect you at five o'clock.

Your affectionate father,

ALEXANDRE.

Renée turned the letter over to see whether it contained any news on the other side.

"I wonder what my father wants me for in such a hurry. Did he leave any message?" she enquired of the servant.

"No, madame. He merely told me to deliver this note, and to let him know if the time would be convenient."

"Tell my father I shall be with him at five o'clock this evening, and let the coachman know that he is to be here punctually at a quarter to the hour, as my father cannot bear to be kept waiting."

The maid bowed and retired, wondering in her mind what could have given rise to her icy reply.

"Mademoiselle is generally so sweet to everyone," she said to herself. "I never saw her so nervous and reserved before, I wonder what can have happened. However, it is no business of mine." And she went downstairs to discuss the affair with the cook.

Poor Renée trembled all over, and a deep sigh escaped her as soon as she was alone.

"I know my father has only sent for me to make me promise to marry some horrid man. It must be for some such reason. What else could he want me for? Oh dear, oh dear, why cannot he leave me in peace? I am so happy here."

"I wonder who he can have in his mind? I am certain it cannot be anyone really nice, all his male friends are such horrid people."

For a long time she lay down in a kind of stupor, until at length her maid knocked at the door, and informed her that the carriage was waiting. Hurriedly putting on her hat and cloak, she ran downstairs, and drove off to her father's house.

The clock had just struck five as she entered the vestibule and handed her card to the portier.

The moment she was ushered into the sitting-room her father rose to receive her.

"Well, my child," said Monsieur Payot, closing the door after she had taken off her things, "sit down and let me talk to you quietly."

Renée sat down, and her father beat a tattoo on the table with his fingers, as if he were calling up his troops before charging the enemy.

"I have observed," he said slowly, clearing his throat, "I have observed that for some time past, Pierre, the son of my old friend General Duval, has evidently expressed a passion for you, and yesterday the General called to ask me formally for your hand on his behalf."

Renée's heart thumped so violently that she felt her head beginning to swim.

"I felt exceedingly delighted, as you can well imagine, since the General is not only one of my oldest friends," continued Payot, "as well as one of my former comrades in arms, but the chance of such a distinguished alliance will greatly add to my wealth and position. Moreover Pierre is not only rich, but he will inherit at least two considerable fortunes, besides being a most charming and lovable young man with an unbounded future before him. Of his affection for you there is not a shadow of doubt."

The girl grew scarlet, and remained too bewildered to reply.

"That's a good girl, Renée, I can see by your blushes," her father went on to say, "that you return his affection, and that your silence implies your consent to his offer," and he rubbed his hands and chuckled with satisfaction.

"But, papa, you don't really mean to say that I have to marry Pierre," said Renée gasping for breath, while the tears began to flow.

"What! What!! What!!! you dare to tell me that you refuse?" said Payot, his voice rising almost to a scream. "You silly child, you don't appreciate the honour he is doing you. Why, Pierre can have the pick of half the girls in Paris. A chance like this will never occur again. Consider what it means," and he marked off the points with

his fingers one by one. "A fine, handsome, devoted husband. A large fortune. A magnificent 'Dot.' Carriages and horses. A country chateau. A house in the Bois. Jewels. Think of it, Renée, any quantity of diamonds and pearls. Dresses and servants to your heart's content. Introductions to all the best houses in Paris, and a box at the opera. Why, all your girl acquaintances will grow green with envy. In God's name what more can you want? Such a lucky girl as you ought to be beside herself with joy."

"Please, father, do drop the subject. I will never, never marry Pierre—I detest him. Besides, I don't want any diamonds or a box at the opera."

"You ungrateful, wretched, hateful minx," shouted Payot, working himself up into a rage. "Is this the way you repay me for all my love and affection? Have I not toiled all these years to give you, my only child, a fortune and a position? And now you dare to refuse to marry the son of my best friend. Are you without a spark of gratitude? Are you blind to your own interests? Can't you see that I am arranging a marriage for you which will at once introduce you into all the best circles in Paris? You ought to fall on your knees and thank God that He has vouchsafed such happiness to you. You miserable thing, you vile. . . I disown you," said her father, trying in vain to think of a suitable epithet. "How dare you disobey your father's wishes?" And he shook her violently with both hands until her teeth chattered.

"Don't, don't, you'll kill me," sobbed Renée, trying to escape. "Oh, father, why can't you leave me alone to be happy in my own way? Oh, what is the matter? How strange you are. You don't look a bit like the dear old father you used to be." And she looked at her father with a terrified expression.

He stood before her nearly beside himself with passion and hardly able to breathe.

Renée slowly rose and held on to the table to steady herself, her heart thumping almost audibly, while she strove to hold back her sobs which were nearly choking her. Monsieur Payot sat down in his chair, feeling keenly the rebuff that his daughter had given him, a defeat which he

was not accustomed to, especially from his daughter who, as a rule, gave way to him at once. He wiped away the perspiration from his brow with his red silk handkerchief, while he revolved in his mind what move he should take next. At length an idea struck him.

"Look here, my child, be reasonable. Your old father only wishes to see you happy," and he tried in vain to smile sweetly, while he patted her head affectionately. "You love your father, don't you?"

Renée nodded between her gulps and sobs, and then burst out afresh.

"Well now, listen. Last night the General brought me a concession for the sole rights to construct the new Morocco-Algerian Railway, which is worth a couple of million francs to me immediately, and he promised to hand it over to me to deal with, the moment you became engaged to Pierre. Now, just imagine what that means to me. Not only two million francs, but indirectly I shall make three or four millions more. Besides, with the General's influence, I shall have an entrée to the Elysée, and be able to secure the Government contracts through the Minister of Finance. Of late several of my schemes have misfired, and my credit on the Bourse is nearly gone, but the moment I can secure this concession directly from the Government, I can obtain credit for as many millions as I require, and then my position is assured for ever. You do want to help your old father, don't you? Now, my child, consider this marriage carefully, and come and tell me to-morrow that you have altered your mind, and that you are sorry that your selfishness stood in the way of your father's recovering his lost credit and fortune."

Renée did not reply but merely looked at her father with a dazed expression, and became as pale as death.

"Well! Well!" said Payot, kissing her forehead, and patting her affectionately on the head, "you can leave me now and go home and think it over."

At this he got up and handed her her hat and cloak, and conducted her to his carriage which he had summoned to take her home. Left to himself he paced up and down the room, and said under his breath as he heard the carriage roll away, "Drat that girl, one can never do

anything but a woman gets in the way and upsets one's best schemes—confound her!" he muttered, "what an obstinate little fool she is. This is the way she repays me for all my love. Has she no natural affection left I wonder? I believe that fool Delapine is at the bottom of it all. I must checkmate his little game whatever it is. Well, Monsieur Delapine, your conjuring tricks will not help you much when I come to deal with you."

Happily unconscious of her father's real hostility and muttered curses, Renée leaned back in the carriage and gave way to her grief. Arrived at the house of her adopted father, she threw herself on the bed in a torrent of weeping. "Oh! mother, darling mother, why did you leave me? Everyone seems to have forsaken me now. Mother, dear mother, come and help me," and she sobbed again. A couple of hours passed away, but Renée seemed oblivious of the time. The gong sounded for dinner, but she did not put in an appearance, and everyone wondered what had become of her.

At length Madame Villebois excused herself to the guests, and going upstairs entered her room.

"Renée, ma chérie," she said, "why are you lying on the bed? Mon Dieu! what is the matter—what have they been doing to you?"

"Oh! nothing, Maman, really nothing. I am only a little tired, I suppose it must be the heat," said Renée, trying to smile through her tears.

"Come downstairs at once, the soup will be quite cold, and we are all waiting for you."

Renée washed her face, and followed Madame Villebois downstairs into the dining-room, trying to smile all the time, but looking so dreadfully miserable that everyone felt distressed and sorry for her. Fortunately Pierre was not there, and as soon as she sat down next to Delapine she became calm at once.

The professor squeezed her hand under the table, and said something which evoked a happy smile.

"Courage, Renée ma chérie," he whispered. "Take courage. Some day it will all come right, but not yet—not yet. The night comes, and with it much sorrow—much sorrow first. I can see it all clearly—it must be; but the

joy will be all the greater when the morning breaks. There is no rose without a thorn; no crown without a cross; no salvation without sacrifice. Remember this, my beloved, for your little bark is just entering the storm. You will be shipwrecked first, but when the masts are broken, and the sails are blown away, and all hope abandoned, then, but not till then will salvation be at hand. Remember, dear, what I have said, for I shall not be able to help you, although I shall be with you always. Patience, ma chérie, always patience and courage."

A shiver went through her as she heard this, and she could not conceive what he meant, but she was too frightened to ask him. When dinner was over she went out of doors, and sat in the little summer house, hoping that the night breezes might cool her fevered brain.

"Remember what I have said, for I shall not be able to help you, although I shall be with you always—what could Henri mean?" And she puzzled her little head trying in vain to make sense of it. She sat musing for some time looking up at the stars and the fleecy clouds which continually floated across the face of the moon, when suddenly she became aware of someone stealthily approaching. She saw no one, but felt that someone was watching her. She heard a slight cough, and looking round saw Pierre approaching behind her.

"Good evening, dear Renée," said Pierre, holding out his hand and smiling. "I hope it is not too chilly for you out here? I caught sight of you in the summer house, and came to bring you this cloak to wrap round you."

Renée suffered him to put the cloak round her shoulders, but she was too distracted with the memory of Delapine's words to listen, and too indifferent to Pierre's attentions to thank him.

She looked lovely in the moonlight. Her dark wavy hair, her exquisite eyes, sparkling like diamonds with the reflection of her tears, and the flush of her face reddened with her intense excitement heightened her beauty.

Pierre was visibly affected at her loveliness and sat down beside her. What a splendid evening to be sure, how I do enjoy these moonlight nights, don't you?" he added, turning towards her.

"Yes," she answered mechanically without turning her head.

"Are you sure you don't feel cold?" he asked, as he began to steal his arm around her waist.

Renée never replied, but the fact that she did not remove his arm, caused him to grow bolder.

"You don't know how I have longed for this opportunity of declaring my love to you, Renée," and suiting his action to his words he bent down and implanted a kiss on her lips.

He could not have chosen a worse moment for his caresses. With her heart distracted with grief—her father's reproaches ringing in her ears, her natural modesty, and Delapine's mysterious words of foreboding evil, produced the same effect as the sting of a lash on a sleeping tiger.

Springing up with flashing eyes and quivering lips, her whole body trembling with excitement, she gave him a blow across the face with all her strength.

"How dare you? Let go, do you hear me?" and she stamped her little foot on the ground. "Let go this instant," she screamed.

"Damn you, you little beast," he cried, wiping his face which was smarting terribly, and he raised his fist as if to strike back; but his natural caution, together with the fear that if he pushed matters too far he might lose all chance of possessing her, checked him, and pausing for a moment he suppressed his anger, and rapidly changed his tactics.

"My darling pet!" he exclaimed after a short pause in the mildest of voices, "you really look more lovely than ever when you are in a temper," and he tried to encircle her waist again.

But she shook him off with a violent effort, while trembling from head to foot. "Go! go, and never let me see you again. Henri, Henri," she shrieked at the top of her voice as he still continued his attentions. "Help me! Help me!"

Renée attempted to escape, and rose up with the idea of doing so, but her limbs trembled so much that she was quite unable to walk, and dropping into her seat from

sheer exhaustion, buried her face in her hands, and burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears.

Pierre was becoming really frightened at what he had done, and proceeded to apologise for his conduct, but she showed no signs of having heard him.

Fearing lest her sobs and cries would attract the household, Pierre stepped back shrugging his shoulders, and with a scarcely audible adieu, he hurried out of the garden humming an air to himself, and disappeared down the street in the direction of the Avenue Rossini, and hailing a passing fiacre, ordered the coacher to drive rapidly to his father's house.

"Who was that chap she kept calling out to help her," he kept saying to himself in the cab. "Henri, Henri—oh, of course, that is the Christian name of that humbug Delapine. Now I remember seeing him once squeeze her hand under the table when they thought no one was looking. I can see it all clearly now. She is in love with the professor. That explains why she was so cold to me, and why she was so furious when I kissed her. What a fool I was not to see it before. Otherwise she would have been only too proud for a wealthy, handsome fellow like me to pay her attention. It is Delapine who has drawn her away from me—curse him. If it had not been for that interfering fellow she would have thrown herself into my arms. Never mind, I will have her yet, in spite of all his fine tricks, and that before many days are over." Chuckling to himself at the sweet thought of revenge, he entered the house.

"Hullo, Pierre my boy, where have you been?" asked the General, as his son entered the room.

"Oh, I've just been over to Dr. Villebois' house."

"Oh fie, so you've been over there to see the pretty bird in its cage, have you? Well, I'm only too delighted to hear it. I could not wish you to marry a better girl. Payot and I have had a little chat about it, and we have come to the conclusion that it will suit our books to a 'T,' if you become her fiancé. The whole thing has been arranged between us, and all you have to do is to go and propose to her and the thing is done. Nothing could possibly be easier. I know she has a soft place in her heart for you, and if she hadn't it is not likely that she

would be such a fool as to refuse a man of your position and wealth."

"But, father, I have just seen her, and she not only refused me, but she slapped my face, and told me never to speak to her again."

"What!" exclaimed Duval, "Do you mean to tell me that she actually hit you?"

"Yes, father, and what is more she shouted at the top of her voice for Delapine to come to her assistance. 'Henri, Henri,' she cried, 'help me, help me,' and then she went into hysterics and hoped she would never set eyes on me again."

The General whistled. After a moment . . . "This is a fine state of things," he said. "We must put our heads together and see whether we should merely watch and wait, or make a counter attack, or fight a rearguard action. The fat is in the fire, and no mistake. But, tell me, what did you do to her to put her in such a rage?"

"I merely went into the garden with some wraps, and when I had put them round her and paid her a few lover's compliments, I kissed her. Nothing else, I swear."

"Now tell me, Pierre, as man to man, on your honour that you did nothing else."

"Absolutely nothing, on my honour, sir, I swear to you."

"Then the solution of the problem is simple . . . she is in love with Delapine."

"I am of that opinion too," replied Pierre, "because I have seen them billing and cooing together more than once, and besides that, she addressed the professor by his Christian name when she called out for help. I remembered his Christian name was Henri.

Now I know for certain that she is in love with Delapine. Well, we must outmanœuvre him, n'est-ce pas?

But that is easier said than done," said Pierre.

"Tut, tut, my boy, that is nothing for an old soldier like me. When you have been through three campaigns as I have, you will laugh at a little skirmish like this. A mere trifle, my boy, a mere trifle believe me," and so saying he lit a cigarette and puffed away calmly, while considering the position of affairs.

"We'll go over and put the matter before old Payot.

He is very keen on your marrying his daughter, and he intends to raise heaven and earth to get her for you. There is no one whatever in the way except Delapine, believe me. Get him out of the way, and the girl is yours. I know Payot will give her a magnificent dot, because I bargained for that last night, and with her income and yours there is nothing you can't accomplish."

Pierre felt more in love with her than ever. The rebuff he had encountered served to stimulate his passion to fever heat, and the very fact that she had struck him with her fist only elicited a mad desire in his mind to conquer her and bring her captive to his feet. His jealousy grew until it knew no bounds, and the mere fact that his pride had met with a severe check, made him all the more eager to have his revenge.

"Curse that fellow," he kept saying to himself. "My father is quite right. Delapine is the only obstacle, there cannot be a shadow of doubt on that score. I have lost a fearful lot lately at the club, and I must get some money somehow to pay my debts, or I shall be ruined. If I could only marry her, I could pay my debts with her dot, and put matters right.

"Look here, father," he said after a pause, "can't we get old Villebois to tell the professor he has to leave the house at once?"

"I have thought of that plan, and even suggested it to Payot, but after mature reflection I find it won't work. You see, Villebois is absolutely infatuated with Delapine, and thinks the world of him. Besides, he is so anxious to watch the antics and spirit-rappings and all that nonsense that Delapine indulges in, that no consideration would induce Villebois to part with him. No, no, that wouldn't do at all."

"Well then, can't we send Renée away somewhere? Payot could take her away to some place where I could see her from time to time."

"True, but the moment she finds out that you are keen upon seeing her, the more determined she will be to prevent you. Besides, if she is sent away, she will think of him all the more, and we shall not be able to watch her schemes, or stop their writing letters to each other every

day. You must not forget Renée is no longer a child, but has arrived at that time of life when love-intrigues become part of her second nature."

"Well, isn't it possible to get Payot to forbid her speaking to the professor?"

"Why, that would be the very way to encourage her to do it all the more. They would seek every opportunity to meet each other clandestinely. Does not Almanni say 'Le cose victate fan crescere la voglia?' You know the proverb, 'You may lead a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink.' Oh, I know what women are, believe me. I haven't been an old campaigner for nothing. The story of Eve and the apple is absolutely true to life. You have only to forbid a girl to do something, and she immediately raises heaven and earth in order to do it; whereas, if you had said nothing at all she would never have dreamt of it. No, no, we must first have a talk with Payot before the Professor sees Renée again, and then we will see how we can surprise the enemy."

CHAPTER V

THE WINE CELLAR

"There smiles no Paradise on Earth so fair
But guilt will raise avenging phantoms there."
F. HEMANS.

IF there was one thing in the world that the General prided himself on it was his wine cellar. It was a long, cool cave blasted out of the solid rock, and extended the whole length of the garden. On each side were rows upon rows of shelves, on which whole regiments of bottles lay on their sides like batteries of guns ready to be discharged. Champagnes from Rheims, Tokay from Hungary, choice vintages from the Rhine and Moselle lay in dozens, ornamented with their red, blue and yellow labels. Rich wines from Portugal, Greece, Madeira, and the Cape might be seen with their noses half hidded in sawdust, while whole companies of Mumm, Perrier-Jouet, Spumante d'Asti, and sparkling Hock could be distinguished by their wire and gold and silver foil pressed round their bulging corks. On each side was a row of casks filled with the red wines of France and Italy.

The cellar was quite dark save for a gleam of reflected daylight which issued through a ventilating grating near the ceiling. On the afternoon following their previous interview, father and son again met in the General's study to discuss further their plan of campaign in their endeavour to get the hated Delapine out of their path.

"By the way," said the General, "I don't suppose you'll have any objection to joining me in a glass of wine? Thoughts and words often flow more freely, and ideas spring more quickly under the gentle influence.

"Thank you, sir, nothing would please me better."

"Charles," said the General, as the butler appeared in answer to the bell, "go down to the cellar and bring a bottle of '89 Berncastler Doktor, and please be quick."

Charles bowed and left the room. After waiting a while the General pulled out his watch and growled impatiently.

"Confound that fellow, I wonder what he is up to," he shouted, after waiting in vain for a quarter of an hour, and going to the bell he tugged the cord violently. "Does he suppose that I, a General of the French army, am to be kept waiting by a mere servant?"

At this moment his valet, a tall, military-looking man named Robert, entered the room and saluted.

"Robert," he thundered, "what the devil does this mean? Mille Tonneres! what is that fellow Charles doing? I sent him down for a bottle of wine nearly half-an-hour ago. Go and find him at once. Sac—r—re Bleu! This is mutiny," he yelled.

Robert saluted and backed out.

Presently he returned with the cook supporting Charles, who was trembling from head to foot.

"Nom de Dieu! What on earth does this mean?" said the General astonished.

"If you please, mon Général," said the valet, saluting with his disengaged hand, "we found him lying on his face in the cellar, moaning piteously, and covering his face with his hands."

"Did he fall down the steps then?"

"No, sir, oh no, sir," said the butler in a piteous tone of voice, and trembling more than ever. "I got inside the cellar all right, and was in the act of lighting a candle to choose your bottle, when I saw a tall man staring at me with the most piercing eyes I ever saw."

"A man, did you say? I suppose it was a common thief coming to steal my wines, eh? You idiot, why didn't you attack him, or at least run back and lock the door after you, and then come and call me? I would soon have settled him."

"Oh, mon Général, I was too frightened. I shouted out, but he did not move and stood staring at me with his terrible eyes all the time, and then I swooned away."

"How did he get in?" said the General, unmoved by his excited cries. "Did he pick the lock, or had you forgotten to shut the door when you went the time before?"

"Oh, no, mon Général, that would be impossible, as the door shuts by itself with a spring lock. I found the door locked as usual when I arrived there, and I opened the door myself with the key which I always carry about with me."

"Have you ever lent the key to anybody?"

"Never, mon Général, never in my life."

"Then he must have picked the lock."

"That would be no easy task, sir. The lock, as you are aware, is a very complicated one, and of the most approved pattern. If you remember, the maker guaranteed it burglar-proof."

"How was the fellow dressed?"

"He had on a black coat with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour, a white shirt front, and a black cravat. I also noticed he had a short, black, pointed beard, an 'Empereur moustache,' and dark curly hair."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the General. "The red ribbon of a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, eh? A common thief is not usually decorated in that way. That looks like Delapine from your description. But what the deuce did that fellow want in my cellar? By the way, did you shut the door when you left?"

"Pardon me for speaking, mon Général, but I did it for him," interposed Robert, "as Charles was incapable of doing anything."

"I suppose it is no use my going to look for him," mused the General, "if he got in, he should have no difficulty in getting out again. Still, perhaps I had better go and see what has happened. Let the butler go to the library and wait there for me, and you, Robert, go and bring my revolver."

"I think, father," interrupted Pierre, "we had better go to the cellar at once, and see whether anything has been stolen. If anything is missing we have a chance of having the thief arrested and taken to the Gendarmerie, and if it should prove to be Delapine, then hurrah for Renée, eh, mon père?"

"I shall have him arrested in any case," said the General. "But," he added as Robert returned with the revolver, "let us go down to the cellar."

He then poured out a full measure of cognac, and was in the act of swallowing it when he noticed Pierre taking the revolver from the valet.

"No, I will take charge of that," said the General.

"Oh, father, let me have it. I want so much to have a shot at him."

"What are you thinking of, my son? If you shoot the intruder it's murder, but if I, a General in the army, shoot him, why, it's nothing. Allons, allons, en avant," he shouted, looking very fierce as he led the way to the cellar with revolver cocked, followed closely by Pierre and Robert, the latter carrying a candle.

Arrived at the cellar, the General opened the door cautiously and looked about, but saw nothing.

Suddenly Pierre slipped and bumped against Robert in the semi-darkness, knocking the candle out of the valet's hand, and leaving them without a light.

"Presently as their eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, the General thought he saw someone standing a few paces off, and sure enough, the form slowly assumed the features of Delapine.

"Halt!" shouted the General, "If you move I fire—" and he covered the dim figure with his revolver. "What are you doing here?" he thundered.

The spectre stretched out its hand and pointed at Pierre. A cold shudder went through Pierre's frame and his knees shook, but the General, doubly fortified by the glass of cognac and the revolver, felt courageous enough for anything.

"Down on your knees, and hold your hands up, or I fire," yelled Duval in a terrific outburst of passion. "Do you hear me? I am going to pull the trigger," he continued as Delapine showed no signs of obeying.

In their excitement both the General and his son imagined they heard Delapine speaking.

"It is for you to fall on your knees, not for me," the spectre of the professor seemed to say very calmly, and then appeared to add by signs "Fire if you like, but I warn you of the consequences."

The spectre stepped forward to within a few feet of the General. The General's blood was up, he pulled the trigger, and bang went the pistol as he fired point-blank at the professor's heart.

On hearing the shot the chef came running into the cellar, and found his master lying on the ground unconscious, with Pierre and the valet bending over him. Duval looked ghastly palè, while his arm lay helpless at his side, and a small stream of blood began to soak through his clothes.

"Lift my father, you two," ordered Pierre, as he turned to look for the professor.

Delapine's spectre was nowhere to be seen.

The two servants carried the General to his room and laid him on his bed, while Pierre drove over at full speed to Passy for Dr. Villebois. Rushing into the vestibule he enquired breathlessly:

"Is the doctor at home? Tell him I must see him at once. It's urgent."

"Hullo, Pierre," said Villebois, coming forward as he heard the agitated voice. "What is the matter?"

"Oh, doctor, please come at once. My father shot Delapine a little less than half an hour ago, and the professor rounded on him and nearly killed him. Don't lose a minute if you want to save my father's life."

"What on earth are you talking about?" enquired Villebois in surprise. "Have you lost your senses? Why, man, Delapine has been here during the whole evening."

"Do you mean to tell me that Delapine has been here during the whole of the last hour?" asked Pierre, pinching himself to make sure that he was not dreaming.

"Certainly. He went to lie down a little more than an hour ago, saying he felt tired, and I was in the room myself when he woke up. I remember the time perfectly. You must have been dreaming, my boy. Come in and have a liqueur, it will do you good."

"Thanks. I really feel the need of something to pick me up after all I have gone through. But meanwhile tell the coachman to be ready as we must lose no time. I am very far from being mad, you have only to see father to be convinced of the truth of what I have told you."

As Pierre was passing through the hall a minute later, he caught sight of Delapine, and ran up to him.

"Well," said Delapine, "what brings you here in such a state of excitement?"

"Excuse me," said Pierre, "but where were you half an hour ago?"

"Why, here of course. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing; but I thought I saw you in my father's wine-cellar."

"In your father's wine-cellar? What on earth gave you that idea?" and the professor's eyes twinkled with mischief. "And pray, what was I doing there?"

"You know well enough," said Pierre, but a glance at the calm face of the professor made him doubtful. He looked scared and began to suspect that he had been under an optical illusion, or else a hallucination of some kind.

"I trust," said Delapine, "that you will take my words of warning to heart which I gave you in the cellar, and please tell your father with my compliments not to go shooting people who have done him no harm, as the bullet sometimes has the curious habit of turning round and striking the firer instead. But you must please excuse me now as I have to prepare my lecture for to-morrow at the Sorbonne. Won't you like to come and hear it? It commences at eleven sharp. No? Well then, au revoir," he said, as he entered his room and shut the door.

"He must be the very devil himself," cried Pierre. "Did you hear what he said, doctor?"

"I did. I was standing behind you all the time, as I came here to tell you that the carriage is ready."

"Well, how in the name of heaven could he know all this? He must have been in the cellar all the time, and yet you say he was here."

"I have already told you so," said Villebois, "Do you doubt my word?"

"Well, I don't know what to think."

"No more do I—of you, sir!" replied Villebois, becoming nettled at his reply.

The doctor and Pierre drove rapidly to the General's house, and on going to his room they found him lying on

his bed groaning, and in a state of semi-consciousness. Blood had been slowly trickling down his right arm, and had formed a little pool on the ground. Ripping up his shirt with a pair of scissors, Villebois noticed that a bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his arm. It had struck the bone at an angle, and ricochetted off, missing the brachial artery by a hairsbreadth, and had passed out again near the shoulder.

After first disinfecting the wound, Dr. Villebois dressed it, and fixing the arm in a splint, ordered a hospital nurse to be sent for immediately, and gave strict orders that the patient was not to be disturbed.

"Is it very serious?" said Pierre.

"Not very, fortunately, but the median nerve is completely divided."

"How do you know that?"

"For two very simple reasons. First, the probe showed me that the nerve lay right in the track of the bullet, and in the second place his arm is paralysed."

"Will he ever get the use of it again?"

"There is no reason why he should not, if we can manage to sew the ends of the nerve together. I have good hopes that I shall succeed in doing so, but sometimes the operation proves unsuccessful."

"Well, anyhow, I shall go at once to the police and have him arrested for attempting to murder my father."

"You silly boy, how can you? Delapine can bring half a dozen witnesses to prove that he was in my house when the shot was fired. Besides, he had no revolver."

Pierre put on a puzzled look, and scratched his head as if to awaken his thoughts, "I don't know what to make of it."

"No more do I. It is very mysterious," said Villebois.

CHAPTER VI

THE ANALYST

Two days after the episode related in the last chapter, a fiacre might have been seen rolling along the embankment of the Seine in the direction of Nôtre Dame.

It had been raining all day, and streams of water descended through the long pipes from the roofs of the houses to form miniature cascades which flowed with a gurgling noise down the gratings placed at intervals along the edge of the kerbstone. The cochers with their varnished top hats might be seen from time to time shaking off the water which poured from the brims in little streams down their overcoats. Everything seemed sodden with rain. Women leading little children by the hand, who were crying on account of the rain, which streamed from the parental umbrellas down their necks, might be observed hurrying along the street, or disappearing into narrow passages apparently leading to nowhere. The second-hand bookstalls along the river had long since been shut up, or covered with tarpaulins to keep off the wet. Here and there a few truant fowls, or a half-starved cat would scuttle out of the way of the carriage as it splashed along. The driver cracked his long whip in a temper, as if attempting to chastise the elements for their bad behaviour. On the carriage went, past groups of workmen in their blue blouses, who could be seen through the window of the fiacre standing in front of the musty smelling bars drinking their absinthe or vin ordinaire, while in the larger cafés others, better dressed, were whiling away their time playing dominoes, or indulging in a game of billiards with absurdly large balls on very small tables.

Suddenly the fiacre turned across the Pont Neuf towards

the Rue de l' Ecole de Medicine. The solitary passenger poked his head out of the window.

"Cocher, drive to the third house on the right round the corner," said the fare, and the head instantly disappeared inside the vehicle, which a few minutes later drew up at the house.

It was Pierre Duval who alighted from the cab, and entering the house knocked at the door on the first floor.

"Ah, this is indeed a surprise, mon ami." The speaker, Paul Romaine, was a man nearly middle-aged with a crop of dishevelled hair and teeth discoloured from the effects of perpetual cigarette smoking, but a charming fellow notwithstanding, and thoroughly straightforward and honest.

"Diable! I have not seen you for nearly two years. What brings you in here, mon ami, on a filthy day like this of all others?"

"As a matter of fact I have a most important legal case on hand, and I really came, mon cher Paul, to ask your advice."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure, I assure you, but I am no lawyer, and I cannot see how I can help you."

"On the contrary you can be of inestimable service to me. You are assistant medical analyst to the Government, are you not?"

"That is precisely what I am," replied Paul, "entirely at your service."

"You must know then that I am acting as prosecutor in a medico-legal case, which is very obscure, as we suspect foul play—in fact poisoning, and it is naturally of the greatest importance that I should make myself au fait with the various poisons and their means of detection. The case I have to study is a very complicated one as none of the doctors could fix on any poisons from the symptoms, and yet the autopsy revealed nothing to account for the death of the victim. Of course my visit is strictly confidential, as it would not do for anyone to know I had been consulting you. I feel sure you will appreciate my reason for this."

"Oh, you may rely on me implicitly. I shall be as silent as the grave. I think the best thing to do would be to take you over to my laboratory and show you how we make these analyses and detect the various poisons. But first you must have a glass of wine," said Paul as he brought a decanter from the cupboard. "These poisoning cases are wonderfully fascinating," he added, as he filled a couple of glasses with remarkably fine Beaune. "To feel that a man's life depends on the colour of a precipitate in a test tube, or on the appearance of a few crystals under the microscope, surrounds one's work with a halo of romance which nothing else I know of can give."

"Yes, that is quite true, but we also have our feelings of excitement and pride. I remember on one occasion I had to defend a man who had been accused of stealing a gold watch, and he confessed to me that he had done it. Well, I succeeded in intercepting the principal witness for the prosecution through an intermediary, and told him to inform the witness that he would not be wanted. I even succeeded in sending him a hundred miles into the country with instructions not to return for a few weeks. The trial came on the same afternoon, and the prosecuting counsel began to state his case. When he had concluded his speech, he informed the judge that he would now proceed to call the witness, and the usher shouted his name high and low. Oh, it was a joke I assure you to watch the counsel's face when the fellow failed to appear. Ha! Ha! Of course the case broke down through the absence of the witness's evidence. But the best of the joke was when the fellow came to see me about paying my fee. I discovered that he had no money, and so I took the gold watch which he had stolen as payment instead! I never enjoyed a fee so much. Oh, Lord! you should have been there." And Pierre laughed again until his sides ached.

Paul opened his blue eyes in undisguised astonishment at the audacity of the lawyer of treating a criminal act in such a tone of levity.

"Upon my word, if I did not think you were joking, I should refuse to speak to you any more," said Paul in utter disgust.

"Well you know it is only by doing smart things that we are able to enhance our reputation—and after all, we are paid to do it. Moreover in this case," added Pierre, anxious to repair the bad impression he was creating in Paul's mind, "I was really sorry for the fellow as it was his first offence, and his wife came and pleaded so hard to me to get him off."

"Well, I will forgive you this time," said Paul, "but for God's sake don't tell anyone else, or you may get struck off the rolls, or even find yourself in the dock one of these fine days."

"My dear Paul, if one wants to get on in one's profession one must not have too thin a skin; you must make a little allowance for us lawyers."

"Well, for my part, I think it is simply disgusting. You ought to aim at justice being done before everything," replied Paul in a voice of indignation.

"Why, my good fellow, if we advocates were to be paragons of virtue, like Thomas à Kempis, or St. Francis de Sales we should all starve to death."

Paul merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said at length, anxious to change a subject so repugnant to his feelings, "let us go over to the laboratory, and I will show you some of our work." So saying they left the flat together. They entered a large room reeking with chemical fumes. On one table were scales which could weigh a hundred kilos., and on another table a balance so delicate, that it would turn with the fifth of a millegramme.

Rows upon rows of bottles were on the shelves containing twice as many drugs as are to be found in a chemist's shop.

In another part of the room were glass jars filled with every organ of the human body, all furnished with large labels. Beakers, test-tubes, mortars, funnels, measuring-glasses, dishes, thermometers, etc., were scattered all over the room, in what might be termed orderly confusion, but actually just where they were most wanted. On the opposite side of the room stood a large spectroscope by Hilger, used for revealing the spectrum lines of metals, or examining the absorption bands of blood. Near by stood

a row of microscopes by Hartnack, furnished with objectives of every power, which were screwed on a revolving attachment so that they could be brought into position by a single turn of the hand.

Pierre was lost in amazement at the prodigious display of apparatus.

"Do you mean to say that you employ all these things?" he asked.

"Oh, my dear sir, you have not seen a fourth part of our apparatus yet. Just look behind the curtain."

Pierre pushed aside a thick curtain, and opening a door found himself in a "dark room" illuminated by a large red light, and supplied with a washing trough and numerous bottles and dishes.

"That is where we make our photographs," said Paul, "and in the room next to it we make our enlargements, and reproduce by photography, finger prints and blood stains, and make copies of the object seen under the microscope."

They passed along a short corridor and entered the bacteriological laboratory. Here were bottles filled with dyes and stains of every colour. A whole row of copper incubating chambers, each surrounded by a water jacket, were ranged along the one side of the wall. Each was heated by an automatic burner, so arranged that a constant temperature of any degree required could be maintained for days or weeks at a time.

In one part of the room was a centrifugal whirler, holding a couple of test-tubes. These were filled with the fluids to be examined which contained solids in suspension, and when these tubes were whirled round at a prodigious rate the solid contents were forced to the bottom of the tubes, and could thus be readily separated. In another part of the room were test-tubes filled with serums, jellies, and meat broths of various kinds, any of which could be inoculated by touching the surface with a sterilized platinum wire which had been previously dipped in the fluid supposed to be infected by microbes. When the microbes were thus placed in their food, the test-tubes containing them would be labelled and placed in the incubator to allow the germs to multiply to their heart's content.

"Once more open the door," said Paul, smiling at his friend's amazement, and the two passed down some steps into a courtyard. All round the walls were hutches filled with guineapigs and rabbits, others contained whole families of rats and mice, some white, and some brown. Other hutches again contained cats and small dogs, while a large cage in the corner was filled with Rhesus and Bonnet monkeys. Lastly in the opposite corner was an aquarium containing a varied assortment of frogs and toads.

"What on earth do you want this menagerie for?" said Pierre.

"Why, this is the most important part of our laboratory. I will show you later what use we make of these animals. Meanwhile let us return to the first room, and we will have a chat."

"Do you always succeed in detecting the poison?" asked Duval.

"In the case of acids, alkalies, and metals or their salts, practically always, as not only are the tests easy to apply and well known, but the doses to be fatal are usually so large that one can find sufficient traces in the stomach, intestines, and liver to make a reliable test. To take an example. Here is a bottle containing what is left of the contents of the stomach of a woman who was poisoned a week ago. We have already made our report, so I can quite well use a little of what is left.

"Watch me closely. I first stir the contents well, and then filter some of it through this filter paper into this little beaker. Now I add a few drops of acid, and then allows some of the sulphuretted hydrogen gas to bubble through. Observe a bright canary yellow precipitate is forming. This shows me that arsenic is probably present. But to make quite sure I apply some further tests." Paul then poured another small quantity of the suspected fluid into a tiny porcelain dish, to which he added a few drops of pure hydrochloric acid and gently warmed it.

"Now," said Paul, "I take this slip of pure polished copper-foil and just dip it into the liquid—so, and see, it is slowly becoming covered with an iron-grey metallic film. In order to be quite sure that the coating is not due to accidental impurity, I repeat the experiment with the con-

tents of another stomach which I know is free from any poison, and observe when I dip the foil in there is no deposit. This shows me that both the acid and the copper-foil are pure, and that in the former case the grey deposit was due to arsenic. In order to make doubly sure, I take the coated slip of copper, wash it well in water, then in ether alcohol, and gently heat it in this reduction tube. Now, let us put it under the microscope and tell me what you see."

"I see a number of shiny square crystals like little diamonds."

"Just so," replied Paul. "Those are the crystals of arsenious acid. It forms characteristic eight-sided crystals. So you see we have determined the presence of arsenic by three independent tests. It therefore must be arsenic, as nothing else will give these reactions. In the case of alkaloids the tests are much more difficult, because one may poison a person with a very small quantity indeed.

"For example, here are the remains of the contents of the stomach of a child. In this particular instance we found it extremely difficult to detect the poison. We tested for all the ordinary poisons in vain. Here our menagerie came to our aid; for on injecting a small quantity of the fluid under a guineapig's skin with this Pravaz syringe the little animal rapidly died with convulsions and syncope. Hence we knew at once that we had to do with a very poisonous alkaloid. By using nearly the whole contents of the stomach, and extracting the alkaloid, we recovered about the 1/30th part of a grain of a white powder which we proved to be Aconitine—one of the most deadly poisons known.

"So you see if anyone tries to poison a person even with these alkaloids he is sure to be found out."

"But are there no poisons which are beyond your powers to detect?"

"Undoubtedly there are," replied Paul, warming up with his subject. "The ptomaines for example. These are soluble ferments which are formed when any animal tissue putrifies. But although we cannot so readily test them by chemical means, we can easily prove their presence

by observing their effect on some one or other of the animals in our invaluable menagerie.

"I could give you many more examples if you wanted them. Muscarine, for instance, the alkaloids of certain fungi, many snake poisons, and countless different microbes."

"But can't you tell me of something which will defy detection even by means of your animals?"

Paul puffed away at his cigarette in deep thought, and then, slowly removing it from his lips, looked up at Pierre and gave a characteristic nod.

"Yes, now I think of it, I can give you one. There is a peculiar fluid sent to me from Japan recently," and he pointed to a bottle on the top shelf. "This has hitherto defied all detection by chemical means or otherwise. I alone have discovered how to detect its presence, but I have not had time to publish my discovery, and the poison is quite unknown in Europe. I am told it has the property of sending the person off into a gentle sleep from which he never wakes, if only a teaspoonful be injected under the skin. A friend of mine who is a professor of toxicology at Tokio wrote to me about it, and told me of several murders that had been committed through some mysterious drug which he ultimately managed to get hold of. Being unable to analyse it he sent me a sample to see what I could do with it. It arrived only about two weeks ago."

"Well," said Duval, rising to go, "thanks very much for the charming hour I have spent with you."

"Don't mention it. I see it is nearly dinner time; will you have dinner with me? I know of a select restaurant where the viands and wines are admirable."

Pierre cordially thanked him, and taking up his hat and stick proceeded to follow him out of the room. Before doing so, however, he allowed his cigarette case to fall noiselessly on a duster which lay partly hidden by the table. On leaving the room, Paul turned round and locked the door, and the two left the house together.

An alkaloid is an organic crystalline substance containing nitrogen usually of vegetable origin. It is generally poisonous, and in most cases yields brilliant colours with certain reagents. (AUTHOR.)

"Allow me to offer you one of my cigarettes," said Pierre, as they stood in the portico waiting for a fiacre.

"With pleasure, mon ami."

"Diable!" exclaimed Pierre, fumbling in vain for his cigarette case. "What have I done with it? Oh, I remember, I left it in your laboratory. Pray don't trouble to go back," he added, as Paul turned round to enter the house. "Give me the keys, I can find it much quicker than you can, as I know exactly where I left it in the laboratory. I will be back in a moment."

Suspecting nothing, Paul handed him his bunch of keys, and Pierre ran upstairs. He entered the room, shutting the door after him, and then, rapidly placing a pair of steps against the shelves he took down the bottle which Paul had pointed out. Quick as lightning he poured half the contents into an empty bottle which happened to be lying on the table, and returned the rest to its place on the shelf. Picking up his cigarette case, together with the syringe which Paul had shown him, he slipped them into his pocket, locked the door after him, and ran down to his friend.

"I must apologise for keeping you so long," said Pierre with superb effrontery, "but I could not find it at first as it had dropped on to the floor, but here it is," and so saying he offered him a cigarette.

The fiacre coming up at this moment they adjourned to the "Restaurant Joseph" for dinner.

Of all the restaurants in Paris there is none that quite comes up to "Joseph's." Monsieur Joseph was more than a great chef, he was a genius. To his way of thinking there was no art or science in the world that could compare with his. "What poetry could be mentioned in the same breath with a great dinner," he would exclaim. "And as to science, we know that Newton, Leibnitz, Fresnel, Laplace, Pasteur, and the rest of them achieved great things, but compared with the victories of Béchamel, Robert, Rechaud, Carême, and Mérillion, they are rien, monsieur, rien du tout. You boast to me of the moral courage of the Christian martyrs who faced death in the arena of the Coliseum rather than offer incense to Cæsar; but their courage cannot be mentioned in the same breath

with that of Vatel, the cook of the great Condé. Did any of them bid adieu to life in the superb manner of Vatel? Ah! there was a hero for you. He actually put an end to himself because a fish he had ordered arrived too late for his master's banquet. What a magnificent example to set! How sublime his end!"

The great man wiped the perspiration off his brow and positively panted with excitement.

The enthusiasm that the famous chef threw into his work was the wonder and admiration of all the leading gourmands of the town. The moment one of his favourite customers entered for dinner, the great chef would wave away the garçon who came up to take orders of his customer, and attend to him himself.

"Now I cannot allow you to choose your own dinner, permit me to suggest for the Hors d'Oeuvres some salade d'Anchovis with Hareng Marines and just a suspicion of Kets Cavier at the side."

"Yes, that is excellent."

"Now for soup. What do you say to crême d'orge à l'allemande? Oh, you prefer 'clear.' Just a little Consommé Julienne en Tasse, as we must not spoil the appetite for the fish and entrées. A small glass of gin a l'anglaise with it is wonderfully appetising and forms a superb apéritif."

"Quite so."

"And for fish, ah, le voilà. Grey Mullets Meunière, or do you prefer Escalopes de Mostele écossaise just brought in fresh this morning, with a little dry hock? And after that what shall we suggest? Ah! I know, my superb dish, a 'Caneton à la presse.' But gently, gently, messieurs, you cannot pass over my Poussins Picadilly, and to please the palate a demi-bouteille of my special '84 Beaune, it is superb, it will clear the brain." And so the worthy man would go on.

To watch him carve a 'Caneton roti a l'anglaise' was a marvel of dexterity and skill, and was considered one of the sights of Paris. It was a masterpiece of carving. Transfixing the bird by means of a large fork, with half-a-dozen rapid strokes of the knife, never exceeding one stroke for each limb, slish slash, slish slash, and the bird

would apparently fall to pieces completely dismembered. "Ah!" he would exclaim, "no chef in England or Germany can perform a feat like that. There is one God and one Joseph, and the latter is the king of chefs, n'est-ce pas?" and smiling in conscious triumph he would place the disarticulated fowl before his astonished guests. "Ah, where would Paris be without its restaurants, and where would the restaurants be without their chefs?"

"Where indeed," replied Pierre and Paul in one breath, as they gazed in astonishment at the great man in his white cap jauntily placed on his head, as he stood before them with his arms folded, awaiting the applause which he knew was sure to follow.

"Yes," replied Joseph, "if only the Emperor Napoleon III. had permitted me to cook for him, how different would have been the result. He would have led his brave army straight to Berlin. Victory would have followed victory."

"And then?" asked Paul amused.

"Why, monsieur, of course we should have dictated terms at Berlin, instead of being massacred by the hated Prussians at Sedan."

"But never mind, a time will come—a time will come—les Bosches nous les aurons, mon Dieu! Nous avons plus que quinze centmille braves—brave comme des lions—Diable!

"But messieurs, they are not eating, and they are positively allowing the Mousselmes de Volaille a l'Indienne to get cold," and the great man nearly wept in despair.

"Mille tonnerres!" he would exclaim, "Les messieurs have eaten their pudding glacé amilcar without blending the flavour with my special brand of Veuve Clicot. Mais c'est terrible!" and he ran off to order the sommelier to fetch the bottle. "And now," he said, "I will call the garçon to fetch you each a cup of my extra special coffee. Such coffee, messieurs, you will not obtain in any other house in Paris. I have spent years in experimenting with the different varieties of coffée beans to discover the most perfect blend."

"Can you give us the recipe?" enquired Pierre and Paul together.

"Oh, messieurs, you would surely not rob a man of the fruit of his labours; but I can tell you this much—there are six varieties of the coffee berries in it, and the discovery and correct blending of these different beans is the outcome of a lifetime of study. The moment I become convinced that any chef produces a superior coffee to mine, I shall put an end to myself, for I shall be too mortified to survive the disgrace."

It was past midnight when our two friends left the restaurant. They strolled for some distance along the boulevards watching the merry crowds of midnight revellers who seem never to be tired of chatting together. Some might be seen in groups round the marble tables under the awnings of the cafés facing the pavement, while others again could be seen inside the heated rooms listening to the strains of some Hungarian band playing their weird Czardas.

Here and there a group of shop girls might be seen hurrying home with rapid footsteps, or dawdling in front of the shop windows, while the ceaseless flow of vehicles and passengers gave the stranger the idea that Paris never went to bed at all.

It was during the early hours of the morning when Paul and Pierre entered their respective apartments.

They were thoroughly tired out, and tried to sleep, but the roar of the great city, like the roar of the ever-sounding sea, continued to break on their ears without a pause.

CHAPTER VII

RENEE'S EXPERIENCE IN STORM AND SUNSHINE

THE next afternoon about three o'clock, Payot called at the house of Villebois, to see his daughter.

"Well, my child, have you made up your mind yet?"

"Yes, father, I have."

"Ah! that's a good girl. I knew you would respect your old father's wishes, and take a reasonable view of the matter. A little reflection and a little reasoning was doubtless necessary to show that it was the only sensible thing you could do. Now you see that nothing could further your interests better, and you will always have the satisfaction of knowing that you were the means of binding our two families together by marrying Pierre, eh Renée?" and he patted her on the head.

"Oh, father," she faltered, "I never meant that. You misunderstand me. I loathe Pierre. How can you ask me to marry such a brute?"

"What? You dare to tell me that you won't marry the son of my old comrade-in-arms?" shrieked Payot. "You obstinate hussy, you vile wretch, you bastard, I disown you," he cried in his fury, not thinking that his words affected himself as well as her. "I shall cut you out of my will entirely—at least," he added, "not a penny beyond what the law compels me to leave you. Don't expect anything from me when you marry that pauper, that madman Delapine. You may go begging in the streets for all I care. Go away and be damned to you, with your father's curses on your head—you, you . . . I don't know what to call you, you child of an abandoned woman."

The poor girl buried her face in her hands and sobbed convulsively.

"Oh, father, father, don't say such dreadful things, you are too cruel to me. Why do you treat me in this way? Why do you speak evil of my darling mother who is in the grave? Is it because I refuse to marry a man I detest?"

Payot worked himself into a terrible rage, and Renée's sobs only added fuel to the flames.

"Get out of my presence this instant, and never come near my house again. Do you hear what I say?" he added as Renée made no attempt to move. "If ever you dare to speak to me again I shall hand you over to the police," he shouted, not knowing what he was saying. "Go," he said in a voice husky and almost incoherent with rage, and rushing at her, shook her violently, and struck her across the face with his fist.

The girl fell on to the ground moaning, and then swooned away. Payot tried to raise her and wake her up, but she never moved, and at length he became really frightened and rang the bell violently.

"François," he said, trying hard to control his passion and appear calm, "my daughter has fainted, I think it must be the heat. Run and bring me a glass of cognac."

The butler returned with the brandy, which her father tried in vain to make her swallow.

"Come now, come now, don't pretend in this way. You needn't try to make me believe that you are hurt. Wake up at once, Renée, and take this brandy. Do you hear me? Now then, you little fool, don't sham any more," and so saying he tried to force the liquid down her throat by main force.

Renée, nearly choked by the fluid going down the wrong way, set up so violent a fit of spasmodic coughing that he had to get François to help him bring her round.

"I think we had better carry her up to her room, and lay her on her bed. The heat has evidently been too much for her," he said to the butler. "Go and tell her maid to come and look after her."

Having once more assured himself that she had only

fainted, he gave the necessary instructions to the maid, and left the house. Stepping into his carriage he drove home. "I am afraid I must have lost my temper a bit," he said to himself, feeling now that he had calmed down, a tinge of remorse for his brutal conduct. "Well, it was entirely her fault," he exclaimed. "The obstinacy of that girl after all I have done for her is perfectly inconceivable," and consoling himself with his magnanimity, he walked up the steps of his house.

Renée, exhausted with weeping, opened her eyes, and sipped the brandy which her maid had brought her.

"My poor darling, what have they been doing to her!" she exclaimed.

"Please leave me," she said in a scarcely audible voice, "and don't allow anyone to see me on any pretence whatever, do you understand? Now pull down the blinds, and leave me alone."

As soon as Marie had gone, Renée rolled over on her face, covering it with her hands, and burst out into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

Dinner was announced, but the young lady did not appear.

"I must go and see what is the matter," said Madame Villebois, as she hurried upstairs to Renée's room. She found the door locked. "What is the meaning of this?" she asked Marie.

"Please, madame, my mistress has a dreadful headache, and has given orders that no one is to be allowed to see her."

Madame ran down to her husband with a terrible story that she was dying, and advised a consultation of eminent specialists, and suggested bursting the door open.

"Leave her alone, my dear. Something has evidently upset her, she will have brain fever if you go and frighten her like that?"

"You're a cruel, ungrateful man, Adolphe, that's the plain truth. I never heard of anyone with so little feeling as you show, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. To think of the poor lamb being neglected in this way. I call it perfectly disgraceful. You men are all a set of heartless creatures."

"Tut, tut, my dear. Let her have a good cry, there's

nothing like it. She will soon get over it, and to-morrow she will be all right," and taking his wife by the arm, he led her off to dinner.

Renée woke up in the morning with a splitting headache, but feeling better towards evening, she rose and dressed, and after removing the traces of her crying, walked downstairs into the parlour.

The room was empty, and going to the piano the girl sat down in a dazed condition and attempted to play. But her heart was too sad, and Renée mechanically passed her hands over the keys, hardly conscious of what she was playing.

Renée was about to close the lid of the instrument, when she became aware of someone near her, and looking round saw Delapine who had just returned from the university, and had silently entered the room for his evening cup of coffee.

"Is that you, Henri?" she called out as she rose from the music stool and caught hold of him convulsively by the arms.

"My dear child, whatever is the matter with you? You have been crying. Come and sit down, my poor little Renée, and let me comfort you."

"Oh, Henri," she cried, "do please help me. Father came to see me yesterday, and tried all he could to make me promise to marry Pierre, and I flatly refused to have anything to do with him, and so he swore at me and vowed he would cut me off with a shilling, and turn me into the streets. I did not mind that so much, but when he told me my darling mother was an abandoned woman, which you know is a lie, and then struck me across the face, and bade me never see him again, I broke down, and I think I must have swooned away, because I didn't remember anything until I found myself on my bed. And now I am all alone in the world, and I have no one to go to in my trouble. Oh, why did my poor mother die so soon? You don't know what she was to me, Henri," and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Renée dear, may I be your protector? Come to me and I will never leave you. God knows I love you better than my own life. Yes, a thousand times better. Will

you share your lot with me, darling? I am not rich, but all that I have is yours, and what I have not shall be made up for by my love and devotion."

Her heart was too full to reply. She just nestled in his arms, and their lips met in one lingering delicious kiss of ecstasy.

"God bless you, my own petite Renée," he answered, "I have given you my soul, dear, and in giving you that I have given you everything."

She fell into a reverie of keen delight, so keen that she felt herself becoming overwhelmed with the intoxication of love's young dream, and with a great effort she woke up to the realities of life.

"But how did you contrive to come here so early? You don't generally manage to do so."

"Well, to tell the truth, I knew everything that had happened, and so I hurried away from my laboratory in a fiacre, so as to be ready to help you the moment you dressed and came downstairs."

"Do you mean to say that you knew that father had been storming at me and hit me?"

"Yes, dear. I don't know everything, but I knew that, and I arrived here just as you entered this room, and the moment you sat down to the piano I stole in on tip-toe, and stood behind you."

Renée opened her large eyes with mingled astonishment and awe, and paused in thought.

"Will you always love me, Henri? Even when I am old and wrinkled?" she suddenly exclaimed, as if the thought of possessing him was too good to be true.

"To the eyes of real love, dear, the loved one never becomes old or wrinkled," he replied gravely.

"But will you love me very much?"

"That depends on you as well, Renée," said the professor, amused at her question. "Don't you know that Italian saying which I think is attributed to Goldoni, 'Amor solo d'amor si pasce,' 'Love feeds on love and increases by exchange'? However, let us be happy for this one short hour at any rate," he added slowly with a sigh.

"Why do you sigh?" she asked, looking alarmed.

"Have you then so soon forgotten what I told you?"

Of course she remembered the words. But what did they mean?

"I cannot tell you now," he replied, "but, dear one, you know that I have opened up my soul to you, so that you might be able to understand me."

"I do understand you, Henri, you know I do."

"Then you will trust me, won't you?"

Renée merely squeezed his hand, and looked into his eyes with a smile.

"Of course I will," she added, as a slight cloud passed over Delapine's brow. "But does it mean that we shall be separated again?" she enquired after a long pause.

"Yes, Renée, for some little time to come. But take courage, ma chérie, as I told you before it will all come right. And now, dear, the coffee is coming, and I hear Dr. Villebois in the hall."

Renée rushed back to the piano and began turning over her music, while the professor sank demurely into an armchair, and was apparently deeply engaged in reading the *Petit Journal* upside down when Villebois walked into the room.

"Well, Delapine, mon brave, how is it that you are here so early?"

"As a matter of fact I had some very important business to attend to here, and so I came a little earlier than I intended."

"I hope the business proved satisfactory?"

"Very much so indeed," replied Delapine, looking slyly at Renée, who blushed like a peony up to the roots of her hair.

"Ha, ha! I see, I see," said Villebois, slyly shaking his finger at them both. "Splendid, splendid," he cried. "Take care of her, Delapine, my boy, you have won the greatest treasure in all France. And you, my dear, have got a man who has not his equal anywhere. He is something more than a man, he is a hero, Renée. Mark my words, before we are two years older he will be the greatest savant in Europe. Give me your hands, both of you, and let me be the first to join them together. 'Pon my word,

I think I am as pleased as either of you. But, not a word, not a word, eh, professor?"

"Thank you ever so much for your congratulations, doctor, and also for your hint of caution; were things otherwise, we should ask you to tell all the world, but under the circumstances it is better we should keep it strictly to ourselves. I have good reasons for believing that more than one person is anxious to separate us, and would do anything to get us out of the way."

"Do you really mean it, professor? I can't imagine that anyone would wish you evil. Surely you don't mean to say that you have enemies who come to my house?"

"It is not my habit to mention names, my dear doctor, but I assure you, you have a Judas among your disciples. Nay, you have two or three who would be delighted to see me dead."

"Come, my dear professor, you don't really mean that. You must be joking. Take the people who were at the dinner the other evening, Riche, Marcel, the Duvals, father and son. Surely they are all your friends and strictly honourable."

"Oh, yes! Brutus is an honourable man, so are they all, all honourable men," said Delapine, imitating the mocking sarcasm of Mark Antony.

"Are you not sarcastic, professor, or do you mean it?"

"Yes, doctor," Renée interposed, "Henri is right and he means it. Oh, I know it so well," she replied bitterly.

Henri squeezed her hand while she clung close to him for protection.

"As far as I am concerned I am not in the least alarmed," said Delapine, "but it is my duty now to defend Renée. I am, as you know, a man of peace, but I shall be sorry for the man who attempts any tricks on Renée, as he will find out to his cost. You know it is written, 'Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves,' but, ma foi, if anyone comes fooling around to hurt my dove, I have a right to set my serpent at him. Eh, doctor?"

"Ha, ha! capital, capital, those are my sentiments to a 'T,'" said Villebois laughing. "But the situation is becoming serious and I promise to help you to the best of my power."

"I know you will, doctor," said Delapine, shaking him cordially by the hand. "But promise me you will not let anyone know what I suspect. Please do me the favour to invite the same guests as you had last time, together with any others you may choose to ask, for we must on no account let anyone imagine we are suspicious."

"I promise faithfully to do as you wish," said Villebois, pressing his hand.

"But you will give us the promised séance at our next party?"

"Certainly, why not?"

Madame Villebois and Céleste entered the room at this moment and the conversation ceased.

CHAPTER VIII

DELAPINE MAKES AN EXPERIMENT IN BOTANY

DELAPINE and Villebois left the room arm in arm, and entered the library where they found Riche idly glancing over a magazine, and at the same time quietly smoking his pipe.

"Hullo, Riche," called out Villebois in his usual cheery tones. "What have you been doing with yourself for the last hour?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have been amusing myself looking through your charming work on Turner's paintings illustrated in colour. Ah, Turner was a great artist, a very great artist," said Riche. "He was to England what our Claude Lorraine was to France. Between them they succeeded in teaching the world the true art of landscape painting. Until their time the Dutch and Flemish schools alone had attained a moderate degree of success, but when all is said and done Dutch and Flemish pictures were in the main—that is, in the majority of cases—merely cold, flat, and very conventional. But with the advent of Turner, a great change came over art. He not only copied Nature, but he improved on it, idealised it, and gave it life, warmth, breadth, and depth, such as only Claude before him could conceive. Ma parole, were I not a Frenchman, I would place him in the world of painters absolutely alone in his glory."

"Right again, Riche, as usual," said Delapine, much interested. "It is a pleasure to hear Turner praised and appreciated. Not so very long ago it was the fashion to decry him, but all the disparagement could not gainsay the revolution he caused in art."

"Look," continued Riche, encouraged in one of his pet hobbies to find so sympathetic an enthusiast in Delapine—the man of science and psychic phenomena, look at the picture of Dido building Carthage. See the towering marble buildings on either side like fairy castles in the air. Look how every figure, every object is so cunningly painted that collectively they form graceful curves which insensibly lead the eye to the 'point d'apui,' which in this case, as you will notice, is the setting sun in the infinite distance beyond, giving immense depth and plasticity to the scene. Look again at his picture of Venice. Here we have a city of pink, and gold, and white, rising like a mist out of an emerald sea under a dome of sapphire blue. What a vista of exquisitely tender loveliness. How beautifully, and yet almost impossibly real. Compare it with the Venice of Canaletti—the same buildings, the same Grand Canal, and yet how vast the gulf between the two painters. Turner's may be likened to a poetic dream; the other, well—the other is merely conventional prose. Take again his 'Ulysses deriding Polyphemus.' Look at the huge rugged rocks frowning over the sea, and the half-hidden giant heaving a large boulder at the Grecian galley. Note the defiant look of Ulysses as he waves a blazing olive tree, while his men are climbing the rigging to unfurl the sails. See the skilful outlining of the shadowy horses of Phoebus in the slanting rays of the rising sun. Could anything tell a tale better? What conception! what genius! it is the power of imagination over the stern reality of facts."

"Yes, you have seized the keynote of his genius," said Villebois, admiring his friend's enthusiasm. "But in my humble opinion his 'Fighting Temeraire' being towed to her last resting place by the fiery little steamtug is the finest picture of them all."

"By the way, what has become of Delapine? I wanted him to have a glass of wine or some coffee with us in the summer-house, let us go and look for him."

"He cannot be far away," said Villebois, as the latter and Riche left the room together. "He was with us a moment ago. How quietly he must have slipped out of the library. I expect he has gone to look for Renée."

"No, you won't find him with her," said Riche thoughtfully. "He is not the kind of man who wastes his time running after a woman. I fancy that our friend is far too absorbed and occupied scientifically."

"I am not so very sure about that," replied Villebois, smiling to himself, as the scene that he had witnessed about an hour previously flitted across his mind.

"Well, you seem to make out that you know him better than I do. Take my word for it, he is making an experiment somewhere. Let us go into the garden, we are sure to find him playing with some worms, or spiders, or something like that. There you are," cried Riche as they approached the conservatory, "did I not tell you where we would find him?"

Delapine, fully occupied with some plants, looked up on hearing their voices.

"Hullo, what on earth are you doing with that Venus's fly-trap?" called out Villebois, as he watched Delapine letting a tiny spider which was hanging by the end of its thread drop inside the lobes of the carniverous plant, known to science as the Dionaea muscipula, with one hand, while he held his watch in the other.

"This is exceedingly interesting, Riche, I am trying an experiment to find out how long the trap takes to close again after the spider has touched the little hair filaments projecting out from the inside of the leafy pair of lobes."

While still speaking, he allowed the spider to fall lower and lower until its body touched a hair. Then, before the little fellow had time to climb up over the leaf, the two lobes closed together and held him prisoner.

"Now let us sit here and watch," said Delapine, thoroughly absorbed in the experiment. "Before many minutes have elapsed the animal will be killed by the secretion clogging up its spiracles, and then the insect will be digested by the juices secreted by the glands."

"And then what will happen?" asked Villebois.

"Wait a moment and you will see."

After a lapse of about fifteen minutes the lobes began slowly to open again, and there before the eyes of the deeply interested watchers lay the spider, sucked half dry, and shrivelled up at the bottom of the cavity.

"What I cannot understand, and what I have been trying to discover," said Delapine, "is what makes the leaves close instantly when the hairs are touched, and what it is that causes the gastric juices to pour out precisely as it does in the stomach when one has taken a meal. In our own case the reason is clear enough because the stomach is supplied with nerves and nerve-ends. But botanists assure us that plants have no traces of nerves. And again, why should the leaves reopen the very moment that the plant has had a sufficient meal? Now here is another plant which, like a chameleon, devotes all its energies to catching flies," continued Delapine as he led them over, and pointed to a fine specimen of Drosera.

"You surely recognise the familiar sundew with its round head stuck all over with little stalk-like tentacles each having a knob at the end, the whole reminding one of a round pincushion stuffed with pins. Now I have noticed that the heads of these tentacles secrete a sticky, treacly juice, and the moment a fly alights to suck that juice its legs become entangled, and the fly is at once a prisoner. Immediately this happens, all the neighbouring tentacles bend over the captive fly, exactly as the tentacles of a sea-anemone bend over their prey, and suck its life-blood."

"I have not studied these plant problems," said Riche, "but now that you demonstrate some of them so clearly they do indeed appear marvellous."

"Ah, my dear doctor," said Delapine, "there are quite a host of problems awaiting solution in the actions of that plant. The moment one begins to think, and to ask oneself Why and How, one becomes aware of one's dense ignorance of the every-day operations of Nature. We are accustomed to look upon a plant as if it were an inanimate thing, and yet there can be no doubt that it enjoys life, and feels and thinks after some sort of fashion. I have often wondered if it ever occurs to a girl as she plucks a flower that the plant might decidedly object to having its head cut off. Of course I do not lay it down that a plant can feel pain in the same way that we do. That it can feel, I have amply shown you, and that it has some dim consciousness of existence I am fully convinced."

"It is intensely interesting, and must be a splendid relaxation for you, Delapine," said Villebois, "but all the same you should not forget that there are other relaxations also, and one of them is to come over to the summer-house where I see François has just brought some coffee and liqueurs."

As they entered the cool shades of the arbour, Duval, who had been passing a quiet half hour there in deep thought, rose to meet them.

"Ah, glad to see you, Pierre," called out Villebois in a cheerful tone, and mindful of his promise to Delapine. "We have just come over for a little refreshment and cool air after the heat of the conservatory. Which do you prefer," he continued, "some coffee or a liqueur? I can recommend this Curaçoa; but perhaps you would rather have some coffee," and he proceeded to light the samovar.

"Coffee and a cigarette for me by all means," replied Pierre, "I always think the two go so admirably together, each seems to bring out the acme of flavour in the other."

"Very true," said Villebois, who delighted in playing the host, as he proceeded to fill all the four cups with the fragrant Mocha. At this moment Céleste appeared on the verandah.

"Look, papa, what a lovely orchid I am going to bring you," she called out, with a wealth of love and laughter shining in her eyes.

"No, no, stay where you are," shouted Villebois, "we'll make it a prize." Turning to his companions he added smiling, "Let us race for it; physics, medicine and law running for a prize in botany, and the privilege of having the decoration placed on his breast by Céleste."

Villebois, Delapine, and Riche, each shouting 'Go' as the word for starting, darted off and ran as hard as they could across the lawn, while Duval, swift as lightning, seized the opportunity to drop something quickly into Delapine's coffee unnoticed by anyone, and then with one bound sped after the racers.

"Well done, doctor," called Céleste to Riche, as with a wonderful effort he just managed to grasp the girl's skirt a second before Delapine, while Villebois and Duval came panting behind, almost on their heels.

"Three cheers for the winner of the Great Flower Stakes," called out Villebois as Céleste shyly pinned the prize in Riche's buttonhole, "I think it was a clear case of the favourite winning. Now let us 'return to our muttons,' or rather our coffee," and so saying the four men moved off in the direction of the summer-house, while Céleste went indoors.

"What a pity you were not here earlier," said Villebois, turning to Duval, "Delapine has been entertaining us with some experiments on feeding insectivorous plants in the conservatory, and began by showing us how remarkably susc ptible they are to the faintest traces of certain drugs. By he way, professor, now that we are all here quietly, will you give us an exhibition of your thought-reading powers?"

"Certainly, my dear Villebois, with all the pleasure in the world," said Delapine; "but it is a pity that our amiable friend, Pierre, should have missed the experiments in the conservatory. Would you mind if we all went back there as I should like very much to let him see the effect of this coffee on one of the plants."

So saying he took up the cup, which had been filled for him, and moved towards the hothouse followed by his three companions. Edging up alongside Delapine, Pierre, with almost murderous thoughts surging in his breast, watched for an opportunity either to snatch, or even to risk all and dash the tell-tale cup from his rival's hand. Appearing, however, not to notice the agitated manner of the man walking so close to him, Delapine adroitly handed the cup to Riche while bending over to whisper something in his ear. Then turning towards Duval he quietly linked arms with him in the most natural and friendly manner in the world, without any apparent pressure, but at the same time so skilfully that it would have been very difficult for Pierre to have freed himself without arousing suspicion.

"My dear Duval," said Delapine, affectionately pressing the arm resting against his own, "you will be delighted with what I am going to show you, it's a most surprising experiment."

Once more in the conservatory, Riche at a sign from Delapine handed him a spoonful of the coffee, and Delapine

gently let a few drops of the liquid fall on the tentacles of the Drosera.

As Delapine had previously remarked, the effect was surprising, but in a totally different manner from what he had meant at the time. Immediately the drops touched them the tentacles turned over and lost their colour, while the glands changed from a rich purple to a sickly pink.

"This is very strange, I cannot for the moment understand it," said Delapine. "Whoever would have thought that the coffee would have had such an effect?" Then after a minute of deep reflection he turned to Villebois—"Doctor, would you mind getting me a fresh cup of coffee, this result is so extraordinary that I must repeat the experiment."

So saying, Delapine calmly took the cup from Riche, and poured the remaining contents into an empty bottle, corked it, and then calmly put it in his pocket.

It was all done so quietly and naturally that Duval, although beside himself with suppressed rage, dared not put out a hand to prevent it, fearing to awaken the suspicions of the others.

Villebois, impressed with the calmness and with the queer look of determination and severity in Delapine's eyes, ran back to the summer-house, and brought a fresh cup of coffee.

"Thank you so much: it is always better to repeat an experiment, especially when the result is so unexpected," said Delapine as he poured a few drops of the fresh coffee on another sun-drew plant. "How odd," he muttered, his grey eyes lighting up with a peculiar smile of surprise, mingled with severity.

"It is very strange," he continued, "in this case nothing whatever has happened—the tentacles have not even moved."

"But look at this plant here," said Riche, pointing to the Drosera on which a drop of Delapine's coffee had been poured.

"Why, bless my soul, it is dead."

"This is very interesting," said Delapine, "I must take some of the coffee out of my first cup to a friend of mine, a very clever analyst—and find out what he thinks of it.

This is just the kind of delicate experiment that delights my friend Paul Romaine."

At the sound of this name uttered so calmly and apparently so casually, Pierre Duval—already alarmed at the turn which events were taking—became deathly pale, and felt that he could not restrain himself a moment longer, nor prevent his growing agitation from betraying him. With a supreme effort, however, he pulled himself together, and it was almost with his usual every-day sang-froid that he quietly excused himself owing to a legal appointment, and hurriedly went back to the house.

"Well," said Riche as the three slowly retraced their steps towards the summer-house, "there's no doubt about it but your experiment in botany was something out of the common, and besides, it seemed to me that there was something in it which so far I cannot fathom, but it has not allowed me to forget your promise to give us an exhibition of your wonderful powers of thought-reading. When are you going to keep that promise?"

"My dear doctor," replied Delapine with a peculiar smile, half sad, half severe, "I have just now done so. Are you not satisfied?"

Riche and Villebois looked at each other for a moment, and then at Delapine as if seeking an explanation.

Then a sudden thought flashed across Riche's mind, but he said nothing.

CHAPTER IX

CELESTE TRIES TO FATHOM RENEE'S SECRET

EARLY in the evening as Céleste was going upstairs to dress for dinner—a proceeding which entailed a very great expenditure of both thought and time on the part of this particular young lady—she encountered her adopted sister, Renée, on the landing.

"Oh, Renée, ma chérie," she called out, "whatever is the matter with you? I went to your room yesterday afternoon, and found you moaning and sobbing, and you were so cross with me, and asked to be left alone just because you had a headache. I know there was some other reason, now wasn't there?"

"It was quite true, I did feel upset, and really, dear, my head was aching terribly."

"Oh, but, Renée dear, you ought to tell me, your little sister; you know that I can keep a secret. I am sure that you had something horrid on your mind, because as soon as I had gone you rose and locked the door; you cannot deny it, can you?"

"Well, if I did, it was to prevent anyone from disturbing me."

"No, Renée, that won't do. People with headaches do not bury their faces in their hands and cry their eyes out, as you were doing. You have some trouble," she continued, "and I want to help you to bear it, may I? Won't you, let me?"

"Céleste, you are just a darling. If you will promise me faithfully not to let a living soul know, I will tell you my secret."

"Of course I won't, you know I always tell the truth.

I never tell lies—except sometimes to mamma," she added after a pause.

"Well then, Céleste dear, Henri—I mean, Professor Delapine—has asked me to be his wife, you cannot think how happy I am," and while she spoke, a look of joy came over her face.

"Oh, Renée, I am so glad," cried Céleste, clapping her hands and throwing her arms around her sister's neck, while half sobbing and half laughing she breathlessly whispered, "I have often wondered if that would happen, I know that you two are exactly suited to each other, and Renée—he is such a clever darling. Oh, I am so delighted to hear it."

"Don't I know that he is as you say 'such a darling,'" said Renée smiling. "I have loved him from the very first moment that I met him, without being aware of it, if you can understand my meaning."

"Oh, Renée, you are so good, you deserve to be rewarded with every happiness."

"Thank you so much, Céleste, and look here, dear, when we are married you must come and stay weeks and weeks with us, won't you?"

"That would be just too lovely altogether. But you have not told me why you locked the door, and why you were sobbing and crying. Was it for joy?"

"No, dear, not for joy, but for grief," answered Renée.

"For grief! Whatever do you mean?" and as she spoke, Céleste's eyes fairly stood out with astonishment. "You are talking in riddles. What do you mean? surely you are not sorry that you accepted him?"

"Oh, you dear little goose, of course not, it was only to-day that Henri and I confessed our love for each other. You have not seen me crying to-day, have you?"

"No, certainly not, but I want to know all about yesterday's trouble."

"What an inquisitive little girl it is," said Renée smiling.

"Do please tell me," pleaded Céleste, "I am dying to find out, and you know how faithfully I can keep a secret."

Céleste's curiosity amounted almost to a mania, and this fencing on the part of Renée made the young girl fairly boil over with eagerness to probe what seemed to her some dreadful mystery.

"So can I keep a secret," replied Renée, half sadly. "But please, chérie, do not ask me any more questions. I dare not tell. And, Céleste dearie, please, please, promise me that you will not tell anybody about my engagement. You cannot understand what terrible harm it might do me if it were known. It must be kept a dead secret at present, you do not know how much I have suffered, and how frightened I am sometimes of my life and Henri's. Oh dear, oh dear, it is really too dreadful," and she threw her arms around Céleste and sobbed again.

"Renée, ma mie, it is terrible to see you like this, what can the mystery be? I must know," and in her excitement she seized her sister's hands, and pulled the girl to her and shook her.

"No, Céleste dearest," sobbed Renée, "help me with your love and sympathy to bear it, but do not ask me any more. Hush, I hear someone coming, remember not a word to anyone," and she rushed off into her own room.

"H'm," muttered Céleste to herself as she heard Renée locking the door of her room, "there's a heap of trouble brewing somewhere in all this. The mystery seems to become more and more obscure. I shall die if I don't get to the bottom of it, I know I shall. Where can I find out all about it? Let me think. There's mamma, but she's too stupid to have noticed anything. Then there's papa, but he's far too secretive and cautious, he's of no use, he will only joke with me and turn the question; that is unless I humour him properly. That is the only way to deal with him. I certainly might get it out of him by kissing him and playing on his vanity. It is worth trying, anyhow. Then there's Delapine himself. He, of course, is sure to know. But then I am rather frightened of him, I confess. He stands on his dignity a little too much for my purpose. Let me see, now what about Marcel? He is more my style, but he has not taken much notice of me.

When he is not planning some new creation in waistcoats, or neckties, or composing a poem, he is trying to say something witty. I suppose the things he says are really clever, although I don't understand a word of them. No, I can't very well confide in him."

Then, as she still meditated, a soft unconscious colour flooded her face, and her voice took on a more tender tone as she continued, "Yes, he will help me. I know he will. Alphonse Riche is a real, true friend. He's more, he's what Renée called her Henri—just a darling—and besides I think he is a little bit fond of me, just a little. Yes, I will make him my confidant." And she clapped her hands, danced round the landing, and actually whistled, which worthy Madame Villebois would have considered a most incomprehensible, if not highly indelicate proceeding on the part of a young lady of nineteen.

On entering her room she stood before the long cheval mirror of the wardrobe, and surveyed herself a little more carefully than usual, then turning away as if half-ashamed of the growing admiration for her own slender but beautifully-curved figure, she murmured pensively,

"Yes, evidently the first thing to do is to make oneself look as charming as possible," and acting on the impulse, she ran across the room and rang for her maid.

In answer to her summons, the door opened and Mimi appeared.

"Mademoiselle requires that I dress her?"

"Yes, Mimi, pick out my most becoming frock as I want to look my very best this evening."

"Would mademoiselle like the blue trimmed with black velvet? Or perhaps the lovely pink gown that Madame Louise said fitted you à merveille?"

"Wait, let me think a moment. Yes, I remember now, Dr. Riche said that his favourite flower was the rose,"—this softly to herself—"Yes, Mimi, let me have the pink by all means; and oh, Mimi, do you think you could get me some dark red roses to match it?"

A few minutes later Mimi returned bearing some freshly cut damask roses.

"Oh, how lovely they are," cried Céleste, "I am sure the doctor cannot refuse to tell me anything I like to ask

him when he sees me in this dress. Now, Mimi, a few drops of Parma Violet—so, that will do."

At the foot of the stair-case, just as she was about to enter the drawing-room, she caught sight of Dr. Riche.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Céleste, how charming you look—just like my favourite flower, a budding rose."

Céleste blushed almost as red as the roses she was wearing, and shyly tripping up to him whispered something in his ear.

"Certainly, my dear mademoiselle. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than a little chat tête-a-tête. Let us sit cosily at the shady end of the verandah where we can talk at our ease without fear of interruption."

As soon as they were comfortably seated Céleste's impatience and curiosity could no longer be restrained.

"Oh, doctor," she began impatiently, "I do so want you to find out for me whatever is the matter with Renée. She was weeping her heart out yesterday, and when I asked her what was the matter she put me off with some lame excuse about a headache, and then the moment that I left her she jumped up from her bed and locked the door. Of course she may have had a real headache, but people don't go into violent fits of weeping on that account, do they?"—and Céleste looked very wise (and very, very sweet, as Riche thought) while putting her question.

"Perhaps we might be able to look for some other cause," began Riche, when his companion broke in—

"I cannot help thinking that young Duval is mixed up in it, but then again what has it to do with Renée?"

Riche tapped the arm of the long verandah chair in which he was reclining, and remained in deep thought for a moment.

"Yes, I have it. Do you remember pinning the orchid in my button-hole to-day?" he asked at length.

"You know very well I do," replied Céleste, blushing in spite of herself.

"Did you notice anything peculiar about Pierre Duval's manner?"

"Let me see," said Céleste, trying to recall the events of the morning. "Yes, I remember seeing him put something in a cup of coffee, I think it was sugar or cream, but

I was too excited over the race to notice exactly what it was he did."

"Was he finishing his coffee, or what?" asked Riche, watching her face carefully.

"No, it was not that. I am certain that he was not drinking it, as he certainly did not raise the cup to his lips."

"Are you perfectly sure of that?"

"Certain," said Céleste convincingly, "I told you that I was not observing him very carefully, but I feel sure I should have noticed if he had been drinking it, because he stood right in front of me at the other end of the lawn."

"Oh! Oh!" said Riche, "Please stay here, mademoiselle, I will be back in a few minutes. In the meantime please do not breathe a word of our conversation to anyone."

"Is it so serious then?" asked Céleste.

"I can't say yet, but please do as I ask you."

Riche looked very grave, and without another word to his companion walked slowly away into the house, with his hands clasped behind his back.

Meeting one of the servants, Riche enquired if he could tell him where his master was to be found.

"Yes, sir, he has just gone into the library."

"Ah, here you are, Villebois. I have been looking for you in order to have a little serious talk before dinner."

"Certainly, my dear fellow, but why the word 'serious'?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Riche gravely, "there are several mysterious things happening here, and I thought that a talk about them between us alone might help to clear them up."

"For example?"

"In the first place something has happened to Renée."

"What, something happened to Renée?" ejaculated Villebois.

"No, no, there is no need for anxiety. I do not mean there is anything physically the matter. But Céleste has been confiding in me, and has told me that she found Renée weeping violently, and when Céleste asked the cause of such intense grief, it seems that Renée refused to give any explanation or even reply, and immediately locked herself in her room."

"Oh, you are referring to her not coming down to dinner?"

"Yes, I cannot imagine what is the reason for it all, but there is more besides. Young Duval's conduct has been so peculiar. Of course I have no right to criticise your guest, but I am rather uneasy in my mind. It seems to me that there is some mystery or some plot on foot. I have no proof of anything definite, but I confess that I do not like the present state of affairs."

"Tut, tut, my dear Riche, something has evidently upset your digestion. All you want is a good dinner, and then you will regard the world through less jaundiced spectacles. I saw Renée myself about an hour ago, and she was as happy as possible."

"My dear Villebois," replied Riche, "we are both clear-headed professional men, and we know that when the thermometer rises to 40 C. our patient is in danger, and so we at once set to work to discover the seat of the mischief."

"Quite so, my dear Riche."

"Now, please, just come along with me and have a talk with your daughter."

So saying, Riche placed his arm in that of his friend, and together they strolled out on to the verandah where they found Céleste patiently waiting for the return of Riche.

"Oh, papa, I am so glad that you are here, come and sit down and do tell me what has come over Renée."

"My dear child, there is nothing the matter with your sister that I know of," said Villebois with surprise. "Why do you ask?"

"Now, papa, there is something wrong with her. She was crying all yesterday afternoon, and refused to give me any reason for it. Is it possible that her father or young Pierre could have said anything to her?"

"My dear little girl, why do you worry your pretty head over such things? Renée is as happy as she can be."

"She may be now, papa; but she certainly was not so yesterday."

"Do not trouble yourself about what happened yesterday. Sufficient for the day is the—you know—headache thereof, as our friend Marcel would say."

"Oh, papa, it is nothing to joke about and make fun of." replied Céleste pouting.

"I am not joking, my child, I assure you I have not been so deadly serious since my last evening at one of the English comic theatres. Now, Riche, I have something important to write, so I will leave this child in your care till dinner; just see that she gets some of those silly ideas about Renée out of her head."

So saying he leaned over and gently kissed his daughter on the forehead, and smilingly excusing himself, walked off to the library. As soon as her father had left, Céleste feeling that she had been treated as if she were still a child, turned to her companion.

"Now, Dr. Riche, you can see for yourself that papa will not tell me anything, and is only trifling with me. I want your confidence. I am sure that there is some trouble brewing for Renée. Is not that your opinion?"

"I must confess that it is, mademoiselle, now that you ask me in confidence, but I have no evidence, nothing definite to go on."

"But what can have upset Renée so much as to make her cry like that?"

"What time was it when you found her crying?" asked Riche.

About half-past five in the afternoon.

"Do you know if anyone called to see her before that hour?"

"Yes, her father called. I remember her maid saying that M. Payot had been to see her and had stayed quite a long time."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Riche as a sudden thought flashed through his mind. "Now we are getting at facts. I wonder whether Renée's strange conduct had anything to do with his coming? But no, I confess that for the moment I cannot see any connection. Still, who knows?"

"Oh, please, doctor, do keep an eye on Pierre. I do not really know why I ask this, but I feel sure that he means mischief."

"I can't help thinking that you may be right after all. Let us be allies in ferreting out this mystery. Will you

help me, Mademoiselle Céleste? Only mind, you must be very discreet."

"Can I depend on you?" asked Céleste, looking up eagerly into his face.

"Like my own soul, mademoiselle," answered Riche solemnly. "We will both keep a watch on Pierre Duval, and on M. Payot as well."

"Oh, thank you, thank you ever so much. It will be just lovely if we can work together. I will do everything you ask me."

After this compact Céleste felt more at ease than she had done for some time previously, for she knew that Riche was a strong man who went to work and did everything calmly, and would not allow himself to be hurried or put out in the least, and that he would carry out religiously whatever he undertook.

The doctor smiled at her impetuosity, and kissing her hand put his fingers to his lips with a wink.

"Allies and silence," said Riche.

"That is agreed," replied Céleste as she walked quietly away towards the drawing-room to join the others.

Céleste now felt herself in the seventh heaven of delight at the thought that she had become a joint partner with so great a man as Dr. Riche, and she accordingly felt herself bursting with pride and importance.

After his companion had left him, Riche remained thoughtful for a moment or two, and then slowly walked to the drawing-room.

"I am quite looking forward to the treat Delapine is going to give us this evening," said Villebois to Riche as the latter joined the group.

"Ah, I am very sorry, mon cher Villebois, to be compelled to disappoint you, but I shall have to postpone the séance until another occasion," said Delapine.

"Oh, professor, what a pity. We shall all be so disappointed, as we were looking forward to the treat. But why have you changed your mind at the last moment?"

"I assure you, mon cher docteur, I am as anxious as anyone to please the guests, but it is impossible for me to succeed unless all the members of the circle are in complete harmony with each other. If you turn to the Acts of the

Apostles you will read that when the disciples were met together in an upper room to witness certain spiritualistic phenomena, that the narrator was careful to mention that they were all of one accord. This was the essential condition for the success of all the wonderful phenomena which followed. Spiritualism is governed by precisely the same laws now as obtained in those days. Do you remember the passage I have just quoted?"

"Perfectly," answered Riche, who in reality knew as much about the Acts of the Apostles as he did about Chinese. "I am quite as disappointed as Villebois that our séance has to be postponed."

At this moment a servant entered the room and handed a note on a silver tray to Villebois.

"Excuse me a moment, professor, while I read this."

"I am pleased to say," interrupted Delapine, as Villebois took the letter off the tray, "that I have changed my mind. The obstruction is now removed, and our séance will be conducted in perfect harmony."

"What has made you change your mind so quickly?" said Villebois.

"The note you have in your hand, of course."

"But I have not opened it yet."

"That is immaterial. Let me read it to you before you open it," said Delapine smiling:—

"MON CHER DOCTEUR,

"Pray give my best compliments to Madame, and apologise for me, as I just recollect I have a very important meeting to attend to in town, which had quite escaped my memory. If I can possibly return later in the evening, it will afford me infinite pleasure to join your circle, but pray do not wait for me.

"Accept, my dear doctor, the expressions of my most sincere friendship.

"Toujours à vous,

"PIERRE."

"It is word for word correct," said Villebois as he handed the note to Riche after reading it.

"Professor, you are a wonder, but how in the name of all that is marvellous did you manage to read it? Do you see

with Röntgen Rays?" they both exclaimed almost in the same breath.

"It is quite simple. My mind's eye penetrates every kind of substance where neither light nor "X" rays can find an entrance. But you will agree with me that a thing ceases to be wonderful the moment one learns how it is done."

"But tell us how you manage to do it," they both exclaimed.

"It is a power which is only vouchsafed to a few," replied Delapine. "I cannot explain it to you, and if I were able to do so perhaps you would be none the wiser. Some day one or other of you may receive the power.

"How do you do, Payot?" said Villebois, as the former gentleman entered the room and joined the group.

"Eh, what was that I heard about a letter that the professor managed to read without seeing it?" said Payot in a tone of command, as if he were questioning a prisoner at a court martial.

"It was merely a note from your comrade's son, Pierre, regretting that he has been suddenly called away on urgent business," and Villebois showed him the letter.

"Urgent business! urgent fiddlesticks I should say. And what, pray, is the nature of this urgent business that calls him away at this time of day I should like to know?"

As no one ventured to supply that information, the financier cleared his throat and replied for the doctor.

"These young men are beginning to assume airs that their fathers would never dream of doing. They have lost all sense of discipline, sir. If I had written a letter like that to my chief when I was a lieutenant in the army I should have been put in the cells—put in the cells, sir; do you hear me?—for fourteen days on bread and water, and by God, sir, I should have deserved it. I must see Pierre, and look into this matter. By the way, Villebois, how is the General getting on?"

"Oh, quite as well as can be expected. I sewed the ends of the nerve together some days ago, and he is already out of bed. He should be able to go out soon."

CHAPTER X

DELAPINE INTERRUPTS A FIGHT

MADAME VILLEBOIS had been brought up in a small country town, and as her parents had always lacked both the energy and the desire to travel a yard beyond Paris or Berck-sur-Mer, these were the only places outside her home that she had ever visited in her life. Of the rest of France she knew practically nothing, and as for England she only had an idea that it was a country of fogs and shopkeepers, where it was perpetually raining.

Her parents were profoundly ignorant of everything outside their own home-circle, and considered they had carried out their duty to the full by confiding the education of their only child after she left the convent to the tender mercies of the parish priest. This worthy gentleman had a sort of moral Index Purgatorius by which he regulated the conduct and instruction of all the children committed to his care, and, like Pope Paul IV., he not only forbade any thought or action which was forbidden in his index, but even prohibited everything that was not entered therein as permissible. The result of this training was that Madame Villebois up to the end of her days considered everything absolutely wicked which had not been expressly sanctioned by her ghostly confessor. Still, with all her shortcomings, she had a fair share of everyday common-sense, and her knowledge of dress and of cookery went a long way to make up for her dearth of mental qualifications. Dinner at the house of the Villebois was always a function of vast importance in the eyes of madame. The cuisine and wines were certainly above criticism, consequently an invitation to dine "chez les Villebois" was greatly prized

by their large circle of friends, and the well-known bonhommie of the good-natured doctor made him an ideal host.

As for madame herself, that worthy dame was absolutely certain that her husband's extensive practice was entirely due to her own smart attire and her unflagging devotion to the culinary art, and from early morn till the afternoon, madame spent the most of her time between bargaining with the tradesmen over the details of purchases for the larder, and superintending the important culinary operations in the kitchen itself.

"A good cook," she used to say, "makes a good wife," and she was firmly convinced that the seat of her husband's affections was located somewhere in that portly and rotund region of his anatomy which was discreetly covered by the lower part of his waistcoat.

"Man is merely a civilised animal," she would remark to certain of her intimate female friends, "and if you feed the creature well, you can do almost anything with him."

As the guests took their places at the table, the sharp eyes of the hostess noticed a vacant seat—

"François," she asked, turning to the butler standing behind her, "who was that chair placed for?"

"Monsieur Pierre Duval, madame."

"Compose yourself, ma mie," said Villebois, "our learned friend left a note of apology stating that he had to return to his office, but that we might possibly see him later."

Doctor Riche gave an almost imperceptible glance at Céleste, who at once caught his eye and nodded significantly.

"If Pierre only knew what he is missing," said Riche, tasting the turtle soup, "no amount of business would prevent him from being at this dinner, eh, Marcel?"

"Oh, don't interrupt me, I beg of you, doctor, I have just swallowed a lovely piece of fat without tasting its flavour."

"Marcel, you are incorrigible, you ought to be made to stand up and say fifty paternosters before each meal. By the way, Delapine, we are very anxious for you to tell

us your opinion on some of the fundamental points relating to spiritualism."

"Don't you answer him, professor," said Marcel, with his mouth half full of caviar sandwich. "Just try my recipe for eating caviar. It is positively entrancing, and consists of spreading it between this slice of brown bread and butter (it must be brown), with a trace of cayenne pepper and a few drops of vinegar, and then laying it on a rich green carpet of mustard and cress. By Jove, it is food for the gods. I consider a man who discovers a new dish renders a far greater service to mankind than one who discovers a new planet. We have planets enough already, but we can never have good dishes enough. If I were sufficiently rich I should select all my servants from chefs of renown. My valets, pages, butler, coachman, courier, and footman should all be cooks of the highest reputation, and each should be a specialist in some particular dish or entrée. For example, I should be undressed by an expert in curries, bathed by my connoisseur of wines, put to bed by a specialist in soups, and waited on by a man who had won eternal fame by his profound knowledge of Riz de veau à la Financière."

"What does that mean?" asked Céleste.

"A smile of a calf to the banker's wife, mademoiselle," replied Marcel, helping himself to some blue trout with sauce Madeire.

Renée looked up and smiled at Delapine who slipped his hand into hers under the table-cloth. She felt indescribably happy, but a glance at her father, who was looking directly at her, brought her eyes down, and her heart thumped violently as she let go her lover's hand. Had Payot seen her smile? She dared not look at Delapine again, much as she wanted to, and although a moment earlier she had been so happy, she now felt crushed like a wounded bird. "Oh, this cruel, cruel world," she said to herself, "why cannot they leave people alone to enjoy themselves?" And her appetite seemed to leave her all in a moment.

"Please do not pay any attention to me, or even notice me," she said sotto voce to Delapine. "I am so afraid you will betray our secret."

Delapine listened quietly while gazing vacantly at a stream bordered by very fuzzy willow trees in the Corot which was hanging on the wall opposite, and made some irrelevant remark to his right-hand neighbour (who happened to be Madame Villebois) about the way in which pigs are trained to dig up truffles. "Large iron rings are inserted through their noses," he said, "so that when the pigs dig up the truffles the rings prevent their eating them, and so the keeper is able to rescue the dainty morsels, and toss them into his basket."

"But is the poor pig never allowed to have any of them?" she enquired. "One would think he would soon get disheartened at this treatment, and refuse to dig any more. I know I should if I were a pig."

"That you certainly never will be," he answered gallantly. "But I assure you, madame, that piggy is allowed to have all the broken and spoilt tubers as his reward as soon as the task is finished."

"Well, I am very glad for piggy's sake that it is so," interposed Céleste. "It would be very unfair to let him be good for nothing," and she suddenly laughed at the little joke which she had unconsciously uttered.

"Have you been to see 'Les Fiançailles Forcées' which has just been put on at the Vaudeville?" said Riche to Payot.

"No, I confess I have not. What is the plot?"

"Oh, it is quite an amusing play. There is a man named Boucher who has a son, and another fellow named Vauban who possesses a charming daughter. Well, Boucher promises to give Vauban a very valuable railway concession if the latter will persuade his daughter to marry the other fellow's son. Of course the daughter is secretly in love with another chap, and when Vauban tries to persuade his daughter to marry young Boucher, there is a tremendous row. Oh, I forgot to add that Vauban is very wealthy, and of course his money is the chief attraction in Boucher's eyes, and the way these two old boys haggle over the amount of coin that is to change hands when the marriage comes off is a caution, I can tell you."

"Stop, father. Father, what are you doing? Oh, Henri, stop him," cried Renée. But Payot, blind to all reason and remonstrance, rushed again at the young man.

Payot's eyes flashed at the speaker with an angry look, as he poured out a large glass of champagne cup and drank it off with a shaky hand at a gulp.

"How stupid these plays are becoming," he said, trying to hide his embarrassment and fear lest the doctor should read what was passing through his mind. "I wonder how people can listen to such nonsense. Such plots can only happen in the morbid imagination of the playwright."

Payot was visibly working himself up into a terrible state of excitement, and in order to steady his nerves tossed off one glass of wine after another.

"I cannot altogether agree with you, sir," said Marcel. "I went to the play on the first night, and I thought it 'ripping.' The whole plot was so well carried out and so natural that I felt it must have been copied from real life."

Payot frowned at the speaker for daring to differ from him, while Céleste and Riche simultaneously looked at each other and smiled significantly.

The financier caught the glance and began working himself into a rage. At first he tried to turn the conversation, and muttered something incoherently, much to the amusement of Marcel who was watching him.

"The best of the joke was," continued Marcel, with a wink, "that young Mademoiselle Vauban's lover naturally objected to being discarded for another man, and endeavoured to stop the marriage by hook or by crook. Both father and son on their side try to get rid of Mademoiselle's lover, but reckon without their host, and find it a more difficult job than they imagine to get this lover out of the way."

This was too much for Payot; what with the wine getting into his head, and the extraordinary resemblance between Marcel's account of the plot and his own dastardly schemes, the financier, feeling his crime being brought home to him, lost all control of himself.

"Damn you!" he yelled, "how dare you insult me in this way," and upsetting his chair in his rage he clenched his fist, and rushing at Marcel aimed a tremendous blow at his face. Marcel, although by no means as powerful as his adversary, was as agile as a tiger-cat, and easily parried the blow.

"You villain," he cried, "this is a dastardly plot between you, the professor and Villebois to ruin me. Je suis un vieux, but I will show you I have not forgotten how to fight," and seizing Marcel by the throat he attempted to strangle him.

Madame Villebois screamed and fainted, and Céleste went to her assistance.

"Stop, father, stop, you'll kill him," cried Renée wringing her hand in terror, but Payot lent a deaf ear to her entreaties.

Meanwhile Marcel slipped on the polished floor, and the two combatants rolled over on the ground, locked together in a tight embrace. Marcel, with a sudden twist, managed to disentangle himself, and by means of a half-turn, rolled over, and springing up, stepped back flushed and panting, with his collar torn half off. Almost at the same instant Payot got up and made a rush at Marcel who stood on his guard. The financier lunged at him with his left, but the poet ducked under his right arm like a bantam cock, and caught Payot one on the right ear. Before he could recover Marcel was at him again. His blows were feeble compared with Payot's tremendous slogging ones. The latter rushed at him again, but Marcel danced and dodged and ducked, delivering a rain of small but effective blows, like a stream of shots from a three-inch quick-firer replying to the ponderous twelve-inch gun of a dreadnought. Payot drove him against the wall, and seized him by the throat with a deadly grip, which caused Marcel to turn livid, and he struggled to unclasp the financier's hold of his throat.

All this happened so quickly, and the guests were so petrified with amazement, that they had had barely time to interfere.

Payot was about to give Marcel the coup de grace, but Delapine was too quick for him. Stepping up he made a pass with his hand in front of Payot's face, and hypnotised him with a long steady gaze in his eyes. "Sleep," he said in a calm and penetrating voice. "Sleep on and banish all recollection of this deed from your mind for ever. Henceforth be friends with Marcel, control your temper, and devote yourself to your daughter whom you have so long neglected."

Immediately Payot dropped down as if he had been struck by lightning. When the other gentlemen bent over him, as they did an instant later, they found him fast asleep and snoring loudly.

"You may shake him as much as you please, gentlemen, but I defy you to wake him. Just try and do it, if it amuses you."

They all three shook him, and thumped him with their fists as hard as they could, but they might as well have tried to revive a corpse. Not a sign of life did he show beyond his rythmic stertorous breathing.

Villebois, Riche, and Marcel looked at one another in amazement.

"Now will two of you gentlemen kindly carry him into the next room and lay him on the sofa. You need not have the least anxiety about him, as he cannot wake up until I give him permission."

"And what will happen then?" asked Riche.

"Then he will wake up the moment I give the word."

"Do you have to shake him, or what do you do?" asked Marcel.

"I don't even need to be in the house," replied the professor. "He will be obliged to obey me wherever I may happen to be at the time. Even if I am a thousand miles away it will not make the slightest difference as regards the result."

"Great Scott!" replied Marcel, looking at Delapine in astonishment.

"I must ask you as a favour, gentlemen, not to speak of this painful incident to anyone again," said the professor, "as Monsieur Payot will not have the slightest inkling of it when he wakes up."

"Now," said Delapine, as Riche and Villebois returned from the adjoining room, "let us attend to the ladies."

By repeated applications of smelling salts Madame Villebois was soon brought round, and she was conveyed to her room by her husband.

During their absence the poet went to his room, and with Villebois' assistance, removed all traces of his recent fight, and putting on a fresh collar made himself presentable once more.

"I feel as fresh as a fiddle now, thanks to my wash and brush down."

"If you will not mind waiting for me in the library until I have fixed things up I should be awfully obliged," said Delapine, "as I must see after the two young ladies."

The professor went downstairs and proceeded to pacify Renée by assuring her that her father would wake up perfectly calm, and utterly oblivious of his terrible outburst of temper.

"Are you quite sure he will not remember what has occurred?" she asked.

"Perfectly," he replied.

Renée was by this time so accustomed to finding Delapine's forecasts prove correct, that she felt quite at ease, and even happy.

"Oh, how can I thank you, Henri, for what you have done," said Renée, smiling through her tears.

"By not referring to the incident to anybody," replied Delapine with a significant look which she thoroughly understood.

"And now, my dear mademoiselle," he said to Céleste, "go upstairs and stay with your mother; and you, Renée, go and tell her as soon as she has calmed down and is able to listen to you, that Monsieur Payot's outburst was entirely the result of the unexpected return of his hallucinations and delusions which he contracted when fighting the cannibals in Cochin-China."

"But, professor, father never was in Cochin-China, and he never suffered from hallucinations or delusions."

"My dear child, what does that matter? I am perfectly aware that your father was never in the East, that there are no cannibals there, and that he never had any delusions. My chief reason for asking you to tell the good lady that your father contracted the mental disease when he was in Cochin-China is because I am perfectly certain that she has not the remotest idea where that country is. I wish to convince her that Payot imagined he was fighting the cannibals when he was fighting Marcel. But now, owing to the treatment I have subjected him to, the delusions have entirely vanished, and he will wake up quite normal. So you must persuade her that she need not

have the least fear that such a painful scene will ever happen again. Now you understand why I want you and Céleste to tell her this story, so that she may welcome Monsieur Payot with open arms next time. Besides, a man like Monsieur Payot will be a most useful addition to the circle as soon as I have convinced him of the reality of my powers, and made him believe in me implicitly. For, as I have already told you, until harmony and faith in my ability have been established among all the members of the circle, I shall not be able to obtain the necessary conditions for producing psychic phenomena. Do not imagine that what I say is a mere trifle. Even the Master did not many mighty works in Galilee because of their unbelief."

Delapine, Riche and Villebois left the unfinished dinner and joined Marcel in the library, where coffee had been ordered by Villebois.

"Now that the ladies have all been attended to," said Villebois, "we may as well make ourselves comfortable, but we have to thank you, professor, for causing the fracas to end so peacefully. Mon Dieu, but it was a narrow escape; if you had not stopped it as you did I tremble to think what would have happened to Marcel."

"I thank you for the compliment, doctor, but you will all be pleased to hear that I have so arranged things that the affair is ended so far as the ladies and our absent friends are concerned."

"How did you manage it, professor?" asked Marcel.

"That is my affair," said Delapine, "but you may rest assured that I have told you the truth."

"And my wife? Do you mean to say that you have pacified her?" asked Villebois.

"Perfectly," answered Delapine, "she has quite forgiven Payot, and will welcome him again most cordially."

"What?" cried Villebois, "Is it really a fact that you have succeeded in twisting her round your little finger as well?"

"Why not? It was the easiest thing in the world."

"Well, ma foi, I never could all the years I have been married. You are a marvel, professor, that's all I can say."

CHAPTER XI

A REMARKABLE CONVERSATION

"Who will absolve you bad Christians? 'Study,' I replied, 'and Knowledge.'"

Conrade Muth in a letter to Peter Eberdach, 1510.

Sempre di verita non è convinto
Chi di parole è vinto
GUARINI (*Il Pastor Fido*, Act v., Sc. v.)

"I do not doubt the probability of a future life even for a moment. This life is too sad, too incomplete to satisfy our highest aspirations and desires. It is meant to be a struggle to ennoble us. Can that struggle be in vain? I think not! Final perfection, I believe in; a perfection which God has in the end in store for us."—BISMARCK.

Conversations with Prince Bismarck,
by W. B. RICHMOND, *North American Review*, Sept., 1914.

"AT last, gentlemen," said Villebois to his three guests, "we can take our coffee in peace. By the way, professor, I want you to explain why it is that the vast majority of mankind pooh-pooh all spiritualistic phenomena, and declare them to be either fraudulent or impossible?"

"If you will listen to me, gentlemen, I think I can give you an answer, but I warn you it will be a long one.

"In the first place there are very few men in the world who will accept, or even admit a new or unexplained fact. People will only believe in phenomena which are in strict accordance with what they have been accustomed to see or hear. In other words, they have a sort of mental antipathy against believing anything which is not in perfect harmony with known and universally accepted laws. They follow one another like a flock of sheep.

"As a teacher of physics I have rarely found a single one among all my students who possessed an absolutely independent judgment. Nay, I will go further, I have

met with only one or two men during the whole course of my career who were capable of recording a new observation or impression without any preconceived notions, or with even a tithe of the accuracy of a photographic camera. People even equipped with all the acumen that a scientific training can give them, absolutely refuse to believe their senses when they see a phenomenon which appears to run contrary to any of the laws of physics which have been instilled into them by their teachers. Even if the phenomena are in accordance with established laws, unless they can be explained, they doubt, or even reject them, and will much sooner believe that they are mistaken, or that their judgment is at fault, than accept the phenomena they have witnessed.

"Take a familiar instance: In the eighteenth century a savant brought a large stone to the Academy of Sciences in France which he declared he had seen fall from the sky. The Academy set him down as a lunatic, and Laplace, one of the members, declared it to be impossible. They all pooh-poohed the fact as ridiculous. There were no stones in the sky—therefore none could tumble down from it. Meteorites, which are merely stones which once belonged to some other planet, rush along through space until they fall into the sphere of the earth's attraction and down they tumble. You will find specimens (some of them a ton or more in weight) in every geological museum in Europe. Now everyone believes in them. I remember well when it was first declared by Röntgen that objects wrapped round with several layers of black paper and enclosed in a thick cardboard or wooden box could be accurately photographed. Scientists laughed at the idea and declared it to be impossible. 'How could light penetrate opaque screens?' they asked. But to-day every hospital in Europe is equipped with an X-ray photographic outfit. If a jar be filled with equal volumes of chlorine and hydrogen gases, so long as it is left in the dark nothing happens, but the moment a beam of light is directed on to it, the contents will explode with a loud report, and hydrochloric acid gas is formed. How? We do not know. Therefore, they say it is impossible. A lump of sugar is dropped into a glass of water. It

dissolves. How? We cannot tell you. Hence they say it cannot occur, and we ought to reject these facts as impossible. A human being is formed in a pitch-dark cavity from an egg almost too small to be seen by the naked eye. How? We cannot explain it. Therefore they say we should dismiss the statement as a chimera. Hypnotism, or mesmerism as it is called, was first publicly practised in England seventy years ago by Dr. Braid. His medical brethren not only jeered at him but positively ostracised him, and so persecuted the poor man for what they in their ignorance called quackery and charlatanism, that he became socially and financially ruined. And yet to-day it is practised by hundreds of medical men, and schools of hypnotism have been established both at Nancy and here in Paris which are recognised by all the medical colleges, and yet it lies on the borderland, as it were, of spiritualism and the occult sciences. Spiritualistic phenomena are rejected on precisely the same lines of reasoning. A medium lays his hands on a heavy table. It rises bodily from the ground, or raps in answer to questions, or rocks. It appears to be endowed with life since it acts contrary to the laws of inertia. Therefore it is said that the medium is a fraud, and the phenomenon a mere piece of deception or conjuring. Another medium goes into a trance, and hands are seen to project from his body which we can feel and handle; or a cloud appears which rapidly condenses into a perfect human form identical in all respects with a real person. We can feel and handle it. It walks about the room. Often it can converse with the people in the room. It has ears and eyes and teeth just as we have. If we prick this materialised body, blood flows. We can even photograph it. It is clothed in a garment which we are able to handle with our fingers. We can even cut pieces out of it and examine the texture under the microscope. It is entirely contrary to our experience, therefore it must be due to trickery, or else our senses have deceived us and we have been hypnotised into believing it. Nevertheless these phenomena are attested by hundreds of the most clear-headed and sober-minded observers in the world—members of the academy or royal societies of Europe, physicists, doctors, chemists, astronomers, etc., etc. A

fully developed human being takes twenty years to form—a fully developed psychic being only twenty seconds. If the one can be formed in twenty years, why not the other in twenty seconds? It is merely a question of time.

"Until a few years ago, the indestructibility of matter was taught in every university and college as one of the most solidly established of all facts. I remember when I was a student of chemistry," said Delapine, "that the professor carefully weighed a small candle and then burnt it away. He collected the products of combustion and demonstrated that the elements of which the candle was composed were only separated, and recombined again with the oxygen of the air. They weighed exactly the same as the candle (after deducting the oxygen which had united with them during combustion), nothing was lost. Nothing could be destroyed. We were further taught as an indisputable fact that all substances, solid, liquid or gaseous consisted of atoms—the smallest particles of matter which exist, which were indestructible and indivisible—and that there were just as many different kinds of atoms as there were elementary bodies, about eighty kinds in all. The discovery of Radium has swept all these 'facts' to the winds. So far from atoms being the smallest things in existence, they are found to contain, or perhaps consist of 'corpuscles' or 'electrons' as they are now called, which are a hundred million times smaller, and these are merely electrified vortex rings, or forms of energy. Hence matter is merely a form of electricity, and electricity, magnetism, light and heat are only varieties of energy in the form of minute waves induced by electrons which agitate the ether. The world is merely a mass of stored-up Force (energy), and this is derived from the Mind of the Eternal. We always come back to the same thought of Virgil's:—'Mens agitat molem.' Only the two thousand two hundred millionth part of the heat and light which issue from the sun—in other words an inconceivably small fraction of the whole of its energy—ever reaches our earth; and only the one hundred millionth part ever reaches the planets of our solar system. What then becomes of the remaining stupendous energy? Is it dissipated into illimitable space and lost for ever? Not at all. The Eternal Mind makes use of every-

thing, and loses nothing. All this vast amount of heat, light, and electricity which emerges from the sun collects in different parts of the universe, and acts on prodigious swarms of cosmic dust and meteoric matter, converting them into vast nebulous accretions filled with potential energy. These mighty forces ultimately form the parents of fresh solar systems, which in their turn team with life."

"My dear professor," exclaimed Villebois, charmed at his friend's words, "you have certainly given us an entirely new view of the universe. But tell me, are these psychic forces part of the same system?"

"Psychic phenomena," answered Delapine, "and psychic forces are every whit as real as chemical and physical phenomena, and are subject to just the same unalterable laws. To quote a great American poet:—

"The Spirit World around this world of Sense
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapours dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air."

"But how are we to be sure that the mediums do not cheat?" asked Riche.

"They all do," replied Delapine, "not always of course, but very frequently. The reasons are two-fold. In the case of paid mediums they naturally are anxious to show something for their money, and if the phenomena do not come off, there is a great inducement for them to cheat if they can do so without being detected, as it is so much less fatiguing than the real thing. Again there is also a great tendency to cheat unconsciously when in the hypnotic condition (as they usually are), and in such cases no blame can be attached to them. Still, many mediums do all they can to help the observers, and many of the phenomena are perfectly genuine, and all good experimenters take care that the mediums are under conditions in which trickery is impossible."

"To me," said Riche, "what you say is perfectly reasonable, but I would like to ask you one question. What is life? When a man dies, will he live again? Is his soul destroyed outright or does it escape unaltered and manifest itself in other surroundings? Is the soul too

subtle for the senses to perceive, or is it only seen when it acts through our bodies?"

"I will endeavour to answer your question," said Delapine, "but my knowledge is too limited to give you really satisfactory answers. All attempts to explain life by experiments in the laboratory, by chemistry, or by physics are equally futile. Bastian, Tyndall, Büchner, Stokes, Haeckel, Kelvin, Butler-Burke, Schaefer, and a host of others have essayed to explain life, and all have failed utterly. The hypothesis of Arrhenius that life in the first instance was brought to this planet from some other world by the pressure of radiation, or the theory of Lord Kelvin that the primeval germ travelled here on the back of a meteorite can only be received with an incredulous smile as being more suited for a romance of the Jules Verne type than a topic for serious consideration.

"The relation between life and energy, or between life and electricity or magnetism has never been established. I will even go further, I maintain that no such relation ever will be established. Nor will it ever be possible for the chemist to manufacture life out of any substance be it simple or compound. Life, I contend, is eternal, and consequently uncreated, for what has an end must of necessity have had a beginning. Life seems to be independent of energy, and consequently it will never be manufactured in the laboratory by any process, nor can Nature produce it 'de novo.' All efforts to describe it are futile. We only know that it is a mysterious 'something' which, acting through protoplasm, enables an organised subtance or 'body' to overcome inertia and resist decay. The proof that life is akin to mind lies in the fact that as soon as the organized substance is endowed with life, it not only transforms other substances outside its body into its own substance, but it does more—it even exercises a power of selection or choice. It refuses one substance which may be unsuitable to its well being, and accepts another which it prefers for private reasons. In a word it endows the speck of protoplasm which constitutes the organism with a will of its own. It is as if it would say to the organism 'Eritis sicut Deus scientes bonum et malum.' Is not that a proof of mind, eh? One thing

is certain, wherever and whenever the conditions are such as to render life possible, life will immediately begin to assert itself, not by any ultra-scientific process, but through the eternal and unchangeable laws by and through which Nature has ever worked."

"Is there any purpose in our being born in a frail body like this?" asked Riche. "In fact why should we have a body at all?"

"According to my view," replied Delapine after a moment's reflection, "the object is to enable a minute particle of the infinite Spirit or Mind, which we call a soul, to be detached from our parent, and become a separate unit. The moment self-consciousness, or the 'ego,' as it is sometimes called, is established during the course of the development of the body, it becomes a thinking soul, and is then endowed with its own individuality modified by countless ancestral traits which it has inherited through an infinitely long series of transformations extending throughout the entire animal kingdom. Only in this way can a fraction of the Eternal Spirit which is passed on from generation to generation become isolated and individualized as a self-conscious immortal entity. And the only conceivable use of the body is to allow of its faculties becoming formed and developed in its 'ego' or 'self.' It is the growth of the body that permits of the soul acquiring the experience, knowledge, and attributes which together contribute to mould and create our human personality, and which form an essential step in the progress of the soul to higher planes of existence.

"These appear to me to be some of the reasons why it is essential that the soul should be clothed in a bodily envelope as a preparation for a higher existence, and as soon as the soul has acquired these qualities, and its vitality has been transmitted to the offspring, the body has no further raison d'etre for existing, and therefore remains a mere useless shell whose future is but to die. We find the same scheme (although I admit it is a very imperfect simile) in the pupa stage of many of the insects, which is the necessary prelude to its emergence as the Imago, or perfect insect.

"Life is so bound up with, and inseparable from Mind,

that it is impossible for us in the present state of our knowledge to say whether Life is the product of Mind, or whether Mind is the product of Life. Our knowledge is so limited that we can hardly explain anything. For instance, you may ask me what is light, or electricity, or magnetism, or gravity, or matter even? What originates force or energy? You see how ignorant I am, I cannot even answer the simplest of these questions. You may remember that the great naturalist Ernst Haeckel wrote a book entitled *The Riddles of the Universe.* In that book he attempted to explain these riddles which I have just asked you. These riddles remain exactly as they were before—unanswered."

"But one thing you have not answered yet," interrupted Riche. "Is there any absolute proof that we retain our individuality and self-consciousness after death, or in other words, shall we not only survive death but become aware of the fact."

"All the researches which I and hundreds of other investigators have made, point without a shadow of doubt to a reply in the affirmative," answered Delapine, "and yet, on the other hand, we have no absolute proof that the communications which mediums deliver in a trance really come from those who have died. By absolute proof, I mean proof of the same convincing nature as a demonstration in mathematics or physics. But if you will have a little patience I will afford you all an opportunity of judging for yourselves, gentlemen."

"But how are we to obtain the convincing proof which you seek?" interposed Villebois.

"By experiment, by patient research, and by reflection; not in the realm of physics, for that only deals with material forces, but by employing the utmost care and vigilance to counteract fraud and deception of every kind, and only by the accumulation of evidence shall we find the solution of the problem. There alone is to be found the key which will unlock the door behind which lie at present all these mysteries. Ah," he continued, and his eyes flashed with enthusiasm, "I can see it coming, I feel it in the air. The day of our salvation is drawing near. The Sphinx that has been silent all these centuries is at last

beginning to move its lips. All our creeds are dead, and all our old faiths are dying out. A new revelation is at hand in the world of Spiritualism. I am fully convinced that there will be no miracles in the world beyond the grave, any more than there are, or (in my opinion) ever have been in this world, and I am further convinced that we shall have all these questions answered in the future life which I know persists beyond the grave. As the poet says :—

"'There is no death, what seems so is transition,
This life of mortal breath is but a suburb of the life Elysian
Whose portal we call death.'

"The saying of the ancients, 'Mors janua vitae' (Death is the gate of Life) is a solemn truth which runs like a golden thread through the entire creative fabric. He that loseth his life shall save it, is not a paradox but an eternal fact. 'Follow me,' said the Master, 'and I will point out the the way of life. I will lead you through the valley of death to victory.' 'Death ends all' cries a despairing world, but the Spirit throughout the ages answers 'Nay, it ends nothing, for thou, O Nazarene, hast conquered death for evermore.'

"Wonders upon wonders will unfold themselves before us, this world cannot hold our spirits prisoners, and other worlds will become as accessible to us then as the suburbs of this town are at present."

So striking was the personality of the professor, and the conviction which his words carried, that the effect on his hearers was electric, and for a brief space of time each one held his breath.

"Don't you believe in a hell and eternal damnation?" asked Riche, who never believed in anything outside his own profession.

"There is neither hell nor damnation for anyone—there never was, and there never will be," Delapine answered. "The only hell that exists is the one that man creates for himself, and he can create a heaven just as easily as a hell. There are no limitations in the future life. Life was meant to be enjoyed, not endured, both in this world and the next."

"And what is your opinion about it all?" said Riche to Marcel.

"Oh, for my part I agree with the fellow who said that life was just one damn thing after another."

Villebois burst into a hearty laugh, in which he was joined by Delapine.

"I think," said the professor, "that it is about time we woke up our esteemed friend Payot. It is now five minutes to ten. Will you set your watches to agree with mine, and then all three of you go and stand beside his couch while I stay here. Precisely at ten o'clock I will tell him to wake up. But mind it must be distinctly understood, and you must promise me, that you will do nothing except carefully look at your watches."

All three left the room and crept quietly up to where Payot lay in a deep sleep, and took their stand around the insensible figure in front of them, each with his watch in his hand.

"Mon Dieu," whispered Marcel to Riche, "this is like 'waking' a corpse, as they say in Ireland. It is positively creepy."

They looked at their watches—it was two minutes to the hour.

"Well, the old boy is fast enough asleep now at anyrate," said Riche in a half whisper. "I wonder whether Delapine will be able to do it? Hadn't we better rouse him up?" and as he spoke he leaned over the prostrate figure.

"No, for God's sake, no," said Villebois in a hoarse whisper. "Remember what Delapine said, and our promise not to touch him."

Silently the three men stood round the couch watching the second hands of their time-pieces rotating in the little circles.

"Half a minute yet," whispered Villebois. Twenty seconds. Fifteen seconds. The suspense was beginning to tell upon their nerves. The silence in the large room was so great that even the ticking of the watches could be heard in the furthest corner.

Ten seconds. Five seconds. Two seconds. And then—the financier gave a violent sneeze. One second and he opened his eyes. A moment later and all the

watches pointed exactly to the hour. Ten o'clock had at last arrived.

Payot sat up on the couch and stared round him.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed. "What are you gentlemen doing here, you, Villebois, and you, Riche? Tell me what does it all mean, and what am I doing here? I cannot remember anything; have I been ill, or what has happened?"

"Oh, no, my dear sir," replied Villebois, "you are quite well. Don't you remember you said that you felt sleepy. You must have had a little too much wine, which no doubt made you drowsy, eh?"

"Hullo, Marcel, you there too. Give me your hand. My dear fellow I am delighted to meet you again," said Payot. "I suppose I must have supped a little too freely," he continued; "I remember having dinner—a very good one it was, Villebois, but what happened afterwards I have not the remotest recollection. Well, anyhow, I feel quite refreshed. If you do not mind, I will get ready to come downstairs."

The three watchers then left after shaking hands with him, and returned to the library.

"Well," said Delapine, "and did our friend wake up?"

"Precisely on the stroke of ten," they all replied together.

"And did he say anything to you, Marcel?"

"Oh, he shook me by the hand and said he was delighted to meet me again."

"Did he refer in any way to his fight with you?"

"Not one word on the subject, professor. I am perfectly convinced that he has not the slightest idea that he ever had a quarrel with me."

"This is perfectly incomprehensible," said Riche. "'Pon my word, Delapine, you make me afraid of you."

A moment later Payot, looking none the worse for his enforced sleep, entered the room.

"Hullo, here you all are," he cried. "I have just been looking for you. And pray, where is madame?" he continued, as he sat down, while Villebois handed him a liqueur.

"My wife had a bad headache and retired to bed," said Villebois, "and Céleste went to look after her with a plentiful supply of vinaigre and smelling salts."

"And Renée?"

"Oh, Renée, I don't know where she is. I think she has gone to practice some music."

"My dear Marcel, what is the matter with your eye?" said Payot. "It looks as if you had received a blow there. You have not been fighting with anyone surely?"

"Oh dear, no. As a matter of fact I slipped as I was going down the steps of the house and struck my eye against the corner of the balustrade."

"I hope it is nothing serious, my dear Marcel? It is your duty to see to him, Villebois, these little accidents sometimes become serious. Anyhow, you could not be in better hands than under the care of my excellent friend here. I would not have been the cause of this accident for worlds, is that not so, my good friend Marcel? I only wish I could have been in time to prevent it."

Marcel looked up at Riche, who winked significantly.

"He will be all right to-morrow morning," said Villebois.

"I remember once when I was a young man in the army," Payot remarked, "a rude fellow stood in my way as I was walking along the pavement with a young lady on my arm. I promptly hit him on the head with my stick, when he replied by giving me a terrible black eye with his fist. I ran after him, but the rascal was too quick for me, and he escaped. I had arranged to go to a fancy dress ball that night, attired as Romeo, and I had the costume specially made for me. Of course the costume had to be discarded, as I could not very well appear as a Romeo with a black eye. So what do you think I did? I got the costumier to white-wash my face all over, and dress me up as a pierrot. And a very handsome pierrot I made, I assure you. Ah! I was an uncommonly fine fellow in those days. "Hullo," he added, looking at his watch, "Good gracious me, it is past ten. What have you three been doing since dinner?"

"Oh, we have been entertained by the professor," said Marcel, smiling in spite of himself. "He has been giving us a discourse on spiritualism."

"Ah, most interesting, most instructive I am sure," replied Payot. "M. Delapine knows the immense interest

I take in those things. You know I have always maintained there is a great deal of truth in it, haven't I, Marcel?"

"Oh, Lord, deliver us," said Marcel aside to Riche. "Melted butter isn't in it. I wonder what he'll say next. My word, isn't he coming round. Surely he's growing dotty," and Marcel screwed his monocle into his left eye and gazed at old Payot with a dubious smile.

"Don't you remember Delapine's words when he hypnotised him?" asked Riche in a whisper.

"Oh yes, of course I do. How very extraordinary! Everything Delapine says seems to come true to the letter. Well, who would have thought it," and then he added sotto voce, "It beats Alice in Wonderland."

Delapine shut his eyes and placed his finger-tips together.

"What are you thinking of, my dear professor?" asked Villebois.

"Capital, capital," replied Delapine, rousing himself at the question and smiling with great satisfaction. "This is better than I expected. We shall have a great séance to-morrow—a great séance. Now I am sure of success," he continued as he watched the mental transformation of Payot. "The only discord I feared is removed. Harmony will prevail."

"Will you take some more whisky, professor?" asked Villebois.

"No, thanks, I am rather tired."

"I shall 'whisky' to bed," interposed Marcel. "If I don't lie down, I shall soon have to lie up," he added with a laugh. "I feel bruised all over, like a cake of dough that has been pounded with a rolling-pin."

Payot looked at him in astonishment, wondering what he referred to, and turned to Villebois for an explanation.

"Oh, don't pay any attention to Marcel. I think at times he does not know himself what he means. You see," he added, "poets are quite different from ordinary mortals like us."

"That is why they require a licence, I suppose," said Riche. "We only hesitate to believe him when he is speaking the truth."

"You are very unkind to rob a poor poet of his character," said Marcel.

"Impossible in your case," said Riche laughing. "You have none to lose."

"Upon my soul, you will be trying to rob me of my shadow next."

"Then we shall begin to believe you without the shadow of a doubt."

"Well, gentlemen, what do you say to our all going to bed?" asked Villebois. "Good-night, Monsieur Payot, and may fortune smile on to-morrow's séance. And now, my dear professor," he continued, turning to Delapine, "I am sure that you will need a good rest before you start your task of calling up the spirits from the vasty deep."

"Upon my word, I am almost afraid to go to bed," said Marcel, as they passed upstairs to their rooms which were next to each other. "I shall be dreaming of ghosts and goblins all night, and imagining that I see the portraits walking out of their frames."

"Believe me you will see more wonderful things than that, my boy, before you are a day older," said Villebois as he shook hands with him.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEANCE

"It is the unexpected which always happens."
D'ISRAELI.

"Le passage est bien court de la joie aux douleurs."
VICTOR HUGO.

AT last the long-looked-for day of the promised séance arrived, and in the evening after dinner Madame Villebois, anxious to carry out Delapine's instructions down to the most minute particular, busied herself in preparing all the details for the arrangement of the room. A sound sleep the previous night had completely restored the good lady's nerves, and the professor's assurance that M. Payot had not the slightest recollection of what had occurred had quite allayed her fears.

"My dear, I assure you that Marcel and Payot are now the best of friends," said the doctor, "and everybody is in the best of spirits."

"But how could that have possibly been brought about?" asked madame a little dubiously.

"Ah, I see you don't know Delapine yet," replied her husband. "He is a marvel. I really believe that he could tame a Bengal tiger with a single gesture, and as for M. Payot, he is just like wax in the professor's hands. You need not have the slightest fear about our friend Marcel either. He has not only forgiven Payot, but has made him positively forget that there ever was a difference between them."

Madame merely shrugged her shoulders, but a glance at the beaming face of the poet who happened to enter the room at the moment, entirely reassured her.

As for the other members of the house party, needless to say they were all on the tip-toe of expectation, not unmixed in the case of Renée with a certain amount of anxiety.

Delapine returned from the Sorbonne rather earlier than usual, in order to see that all the necessary arrangements were made in strict accordance with his wishes.

At his suggestion his host had given up for the séance a large room opening into the conservatory, and it was here that Delapine found Madame Villebois busy getting everything in readiness. All the blinds had been closely drawn down, and only a solitary paraffin lamp threw a subdued light over the apartment.

A heavy circular oak table had been placed in the centre of the room, and round this table were set some eight or nine chairs. The walls had been bared of all pictures and curtains, and with the exception of the table and chairs and a short grand piano, the only piece of furniture occupying the room was a large lightly built cabinet, which had been specially constructed of laths nailed together, and the whole surrounded by a green baize curtain. This curtain was so arranged that it reached the entire height of the cabinet, and it was simply folded in front so that its edges could be hooked back and aside, thus allowing the contents of the cabinet to be clearly visible. The result of this arrangement of the green curtain was that there was only one opening, where its edges nearly met in the middle line facing the audience.

This idea had been insisted upon by Delapine in order to obviate all possibility of fraud or collusion, so that before he went to sleep in the cabinet, every one of those present at the séance might have an opportunity of examining every nook and corner. As a further precaution, Delapine himself had seen that all the doors and windows were securely fastened on the inside, with the exception of the single entrance from the dining-room. And to crown all, a camera was fixed in position at one end of the room under the special care of Riche to enable him to take an indisputable record of any striking phenomena.

The first to arrive was Pierre, who in greeting his

hostess, tendered his most profuse apologies for his unavoidable absence, explaining that nothing but a most urgent call to an appointment at his office could have taken him away at such a moment from his charming friends. And then, after a few words to each of the other guests, he quietly sat down next to Riche.

A moment later M. Payot, fresh and jaunty as if nothing had happened, came in beaming and wearing a large floral decoration in his button-hole, from behind the shelter of whose foliage he showered smiles on everybody.

Villebois nudged his better half and entreated her with a look not to broach the subject of the previous evening's quarrel, but she failed to take the hint.

"Ah, delighted to see you again, my dear madame," said the financier, as he shook hands in the most friendly manner. "I trust you have fully recovered from your indisposition of the last evening?"

"Thank you, my dear M. Payot," replied the good lady smiling, "and I also hope that you have recovered from your fight."

"My fight, madame. What do you mean? I have not fought anyone since my justly celebrated duel with M. Camembert, editor of the *Journal de Paris* fifteen years ago."

"Why, I mean your fight with Marcel last evening."

"My fight with Marcel? My dear madame, surely you must be dreaming? I never had a quarrel with my little friend Marcel in all my life. Isn't it the truth, Villebois?" and Payot, completely mystified, appealed to his host for confirmation.

Poor Villebois looked terrified.

"For God's sake, my dear, do be quiet," he whispered, and then added in a louder tone, "Pray excuse my wife, she has been reading a dreadful account of a fight between the police and the Apaches. That, I fear, added to her nervous headache has completely confused her mind about the events of last evening."

The good lady was about to remonstrate with her husband, when Céleste with great tact soothed her feelings, and adroitly turned her thoughts in another direction.

Payot, apparently satisfied, accepted the explanation,

and at length order and peace were established, and everyone sat breathlessly waiting for the professor.

Seeing that everything was at last quiet, and that all his audience were composed and ready, Delapine, who had been assuring himself that his instructions with regard to the cabinet had been properly attended to, moved towards the centre of the room and said:

"You must not imagine, my friends, that spiritualistic phenomena can always be produced at will, like a physical experiment in a laboratory. Often no phenomena take place at all, and still more often certain unknown influences modify or alter them, so that frequently we obtain only imperfect results, or phenomena entirely different from what we expected. You should remember that really we are here to observe and not to experiment. Let us now join hands round the table," and so saying the professor, having lowered the lamp, placed his hands wide apart with his fingers lightly resting on the table. The others proceeded to do the same in order to complete the circle.

At this moment Riche heard a slight movement, and quietly turning his head noticed Pierre getting up from his chair.

In spite of the dim light Pierre saw that Riche was watching his movements and walking up to the doctor on tip-toe whispered in his ear, "Please tell the company as soon as this performance is over, that I was obliged to go to my chambers at once on urgent business, and much as I regret it, it will be quite impossible for me to return to-night.

Riche squeezed his hand and nodding assent, Pierre unobserved by the others left the room.

Silently, and in a state of expectation bordering almost on excitement the eight members of the circle sat round the table; Delapine, Renée, Villebois, Madame Villebois Payot, Céleste, Riche and Marcel, the latter completing the circle with Delapine.

The professor was the first to break the silence—

"I must request each one of you," he said authoritatively, "on no account to touch any one of the four legs of this table. I have specially tied tissue paper round each leg in such a way that if any one of you touches it the paper will be soiled or crumpled.

"Why did you put a red screen round the lamp, and turn the light down low like that?" asked Riche.

"For the same reason that you use a red light when developing a photographic plate," replied Delapine. "Because it is well-known that a white light would spoil the plate. And in the same way the vibrations of white light interfere with the intensely rapid vibrations which produce our phenomena. But hush," he continued in an audible whisper, "I feel the presence of some mysterious force."

"Can you perceive anyone besides us, professor?" asked Riche in an awed whisper.

"Yes," replied Delapine.

> "The stranger at my fireside cannot see
> The forms, nor hear the sounds I hear,
> He but perceives what Is; while unto me
> All that Has Been is visible and clear.

"Do you suppose for a moment," he continued, "that we are able to be in touch with everything that goes on around us, when all our knowledge of the outside world is obtained through the five kinds of vibrations which reach our senses? I assure you there are a thousand varieties of vibrations of which we are entirely unconscious, but they can be perceived by the soul when it is freed from its earthly environment. Now I will try whether I have the power to move matter by my will. All of you keep your hands lightly touching the table, and do not an any account break the circuit. Each one of you must endeavour to be perfectly convinced of my power."

For a few moments nothing happened, then gradually each one felt a tremor run through his fingers, and the table began to heave up and down first on one side and then on the other.

"The table seems to be alive," said Renée alarmed. "It moves in spite of all my efforts to keep it still."

"Yes," said Marcel, "I have been pressing down with all my might, but it is of no use. Look, look, it is rising up."

Slowly, but none the less surely, the table rose bodily, until at last the members of the circle were compelled to stand up in order to keep their hands still resting on it, as ordered by Delapine.

"Press, press with all your might," cried Delapine loudly, "and see if you can overcome my will."

All pressed heavily in their desire to carry out implicitly every command of the professor, but their efforts were in vain. At last the table rose to such a height that the whole company were compelled to stand on their chairs, but even then their united pressure was of no avail for the table steadily rose above their heads.

"Now, Riche, quick," called out Delapine, "take a stereoscopic photograph that all may see that the table is actually suspended in the air above the ground."

"Right," said Riche, as he quickly took a couple of snapshots with magnesium flashlight.

Immediately afterwards Delapine, who was standing on tip-toe on his chair, suddenly withdrew his hands from the table as it rested poised above his head.

"Stand back, stand back," shouted the professor, and as they all obeyed the instruction the table, weighing about half a hundredweight, fell with a tremendous crash, breaking one of its legs in two.

"Good God!" exclaimed Marcel, "what a smash. It nearly caved my head in. I was too much interested watching it to jump back when you shouted."

"Anyhow I shall have a couple of good stereo negatives to convince all unbelievers," said Riche.

"It just missed my toe," said Payot, laughing, "but all the same I am not yet convinced. The professor can make the table rise in spite of our united efforts to hold it down, but I defy him to keep it down when we all try to raise it up."

"I can do that with the greatest ease," said Delapine.

"The question before the House," said Marcel in English, "is that Professor Delapine do exercise his will to prevent us from raising up this table while we use all our strength in lifting it. Are the honourable members agreed? I think the 'Ayes' have it."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, "let us

put our fingers under the edge of the table. So—yes, that's right. Now then, one, two, three, and all together—up she goes," and the four men and the ladies strained until their arms ached, but the table refused to budge even the fraction of an inch.

Suddenly Delapine removed his hands before any of the circle had time to cease pulling, and called out loudly, "I retire, you have your way."

Such was the force exerted by the members of the circle that the table seemed to be thrown into the air.

The jerk was so great that it sent them all reeling, and Villebois was only just in time to save his wife from falling.

The guests stared at each other in amazement.

"I am sorry your table is broken," said Delapine to the host, "but really you must blame the sitters for pulling so hard."

"Oh, that is nothing, my dear Delapine. The carpenter can mend it to-morrow, and it will be as good as ever."

"By the way, ladies and gentlemen," said the professor, "what do you say to a little music? I think it will calm our nerves, and render us in a more favourable state of mind for some far more wonderful things which I think I shall be able to show you. Perhaps Mademoiselle Payot will favour us with some sweet melody with her violin."

Renée blushed, and the guests signifying their approval, she went and fetched her music.

"What shall I play, Monsieur Delapine?" she asked a little nervously.

"Let me see. I think Sarasate's 'Zigeunerweisen' is very charming, but no, let us have Schubert's 'Ave Maria' if you approve. It is a very sweet, soothing air. Or, if you haven't got that perfect, you might give us Chopin's 'Nocturne in E flat.' I think this haunting melody one of the most delightful refrains in the world. It is truly an inspired air."

Renée turned her violin, which was a very fine specimen of Villaume's skill, given her by Dr. Villebois on her last birthday.

"Won't you accompany her?" said Villebois, for Delapine with his acutely sensitive nature and remarkable

talent had developed a technique on the pianoforte which was envied by many of the great artistes, and would have secured him a European reputation had he turned his gifts in the direction of music instead of physics.

Villebois opened the grand piano which stood at the end of the room.

"No," replied Delapine, "I will take a short sleep with your permission." And he folded his hands with his long sensitive finger-tips touching each other as was his habit, while he sank back in his chair. His face became suddenly transfigured, and changed to an almost death-like pallor. Gradually he appeared to go off into a kind of trance.

Renée, having tuned up her instrument, began playing.

Suddenly the guests were petrified with astonishment by hearing the piano accurately accompanying her all by itself. They could see the notes being struck as if by some invisible hand. What they particularly noticed was the exquisite touch, the perfect time, and the wonderful technique of the inconnu. They looked from the pianoforte to the professor, and observed his fingers rapidly twitching in perfect time with the corresponding notes on the piano.

"Do you notice Delapine's fingers?" whispered Riche to Villebois. "See, they are keeping time with the music."

"It's more than wonderful, it's marvellous," replied Villebois.

But the professor was in a profound state of coma. He never stirred, and they could only detect the nervous movements of his fingers, and a corresponding tremble of his lips.

Renée felt inspired. The fact that her adored fiancé was accompanying her, caused her to redouble her efforts, and she far surpassed her extreme powers. Even her teacher, who was very reserved in his compliments, would have been unable to have detected a fault had he been present.

The conversation which had begun in whispers stopped by common consent, and all listened enraptured.

At length the music ceased, and Renée observed the silent approval in the faces of all the guests, but the

professor never woke. Villebois got up with the intention of awakening the professor, but Renée seized his arm, and putting her finger to her lips, bade him sit down quietly. All the guests remained sitting in profound silence.

Suddenly Renée walked over to where Delapine was sleeping, and clasped him by the hand. She evidently felt something, for she relinquished his hand and stole softly out of the room, leaving the door wide open.

Riche noticed Renée's departure, and whispered to Céleste, who silently left the room to look for Renée. The guests had been waiting in silence for about a minute when suddenly they heard the organ (which Villebois had erected at the end of the library) pealing out the air of the "Marche Funèbre." First came the prelude, then the solemn tones of death and the mourners and the funeral service, and gradually the Vox Celeste and the Vox Humana pealed forth the triumphant notes "Oh, Death, where is thy sting, oh, Grave, thy victory? For Death is swallowed up in Victory." The guests were entranced. The organ, which had a superb tone, was played as it had never been played before.

"Surely angels must be playing it," said Céleste to Riche, who had tracked her to the library, and found her working the bellows with all her might. But the keys and stops moved of their own accord. At length the air was finished, and the guests who had stood in awe just inside the door of the library returned to the sèance. Delapine had just woken up.

"Well," he said to the astonished guests, "I have had such a curious dream. I dreamt that I was in heaven and that I was playing the 'March Funèbre' to a select crowd of angels."

"By Jove," said Marcel, "I would go to heaven to-morrow if I could hear music like that. Why, my dear professor, I never heard such music in my life, and I have heard some pretty good stuff, I assure you. You would make Paderewski weep with mingled envy and rapture. His music one can only compare to a school-girl strumming after yours."

"Oh, please, professor, give us one more piece," said Madame Villebois and Céleste in one breath.

"Well, if I can, you shall have one more, but I shall want a rest afterwards, as it fatigues me more than you have any idea of."

He whispered something to Renée, and she at once rose and tuned up her violin. Placing the piece of music in front of her, she began playing the prelude to 'En Sourdine' by Tellam. Then suddenly the piano took up the refrain.

Have you ever read Dumas Fils' 'La Dame aux Camelias'? If you have you will understand the piece. You remember where Marguerite has been forsaken by her lover owing to the pressure put on him by his good but mistaken father. Well, this piece reproduces the scene, and you can positively hear, and even feel the poor girl sobbing her heart out. And then comes the delightful refrain, and finally the exultant triumph of Love. Never was melody more rapturously poured forth. The guests hung on the refrain, and at the conclusion Madame Villebois was silently weeping.

"I propose," said Marcel, unconsciously imitating the speaker of the House of Commons on the conclusion of Sheridan's great speech during the debate on Warren Hastings, "that we do now adjourn to the smoking room to recover from the sublime effects of Delapine's and Renée's melodies."

The professor went to his room to obtain his much needed rest on the sofa, while the ladies chatted together.

"Dear ladies," said Marcel, when they had sat down, "what Tennyson wrote in the Chorus Song of the 'Lotus Eaters' is quite appropriate to what we have just heard :—

"There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass ;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes ;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies."

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEBACLE

La vie est vaine :
Un peu d'amour,
Un peu de haine,
Et puis—bon jour.

La vie est brève ;
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de rêve,
Et puis—bon soir.

(MONTE-NAKEN).

Concurritis horae momento cita mors venit.
(*Horace*, S. I 1.7).

"Amer sanz paine rien ne vault."—Old French Proverb.

"PROFESSOR," said Monsieur Payot after Delapine had had a good rest, and the guests had assembled in the room of the séance once more. "Did you really play the piano?"

"Of course," said Delapine, "and the organ too. Did you not see me send your daughter into the library to work the bellows?"

"Yes, I distinctly remember her tip-toeing out of the room, but I had no idea she went for that purpose. Besides she has never learnt to play the organ."

"But you remember, papa, I used to work the bellows in the old village church."

"That is true, Renée," said Payot, patting her on the head.

Renée looked up, surprised, and her eyes filled with tears, as this was the first time she had been caressed by her father since her mother died.

"What on earth can Henri have done," she asked her

self, "to have effected such a wonderful change in my father? I really must ask him when we are alone."

"Can you explain how you managed to play?" asked Riche.

"Did you notice my fingers jerking?" replied Delapine.

"Yes," answered both Riche and Villebois together, "and we noticed that they kept time with the music."

"I think it would be more accurate to say that the music kept time with my fingers, eh?" said Delapine smiling.

"But that does not explain anything," said Riche.

"On the contrary," said Delapine, "it explains a great deal."

"In what way?"

"I will try to point it out to you.

"A nervous impulse or current is generated in my brain which flows along my nerves. This current, or series of waves, extends far beyond my body, and my will can influence its direction and force. Thus I can make it move in any direction I please. I can make it lift, or depress, or shift the objects lying in its path. Thus I can cause this wave-force to depress the keys of a piano, or an organ either softly or loudly. I can even cause it to give rise to taps and noises, and I can control these noises, and by generating supplementary overtones I can imitate any instrument I please. Since this nervous impulse passes down my nerves, it causes the twitching movements in my fingers which you observed, and these are synchronous with the movements of the keys of the instrument, or in popular language both my fingers and the keys move simultaneously."

"What is the nature of this impulse?" asked Riche.

"That I cannot tell you. I only know the vibrations are exceedingly rapid. Some people call it odic force, others magnetic fluid, others nervo-magnetic impulses. But these terms are worse than valueless, they are actually harmful, as they tend to mislead by giving rise to the idea that the impulse is known and explained, whereas we are profoundly ignorant of the nature of the waves. You will invariably find ignorant people ascribing these unknown impulses to magnetism or electricity, and calling it mag-

netic force, but it has nothing in common with magnetism, since no magnetic field is developed, nor has it, as far as we know, anything to do with electricity. People when they know nothing about a force give it a mysterious name, and imagine by so doing that they have explained it, whereas they have done nothing of the sort. If I guess rightly, this force which emanates from my will acts much in the same way that gravity does, by pulling two bodies towards each other. When I project the force in a strong current, or as we physicists call it an ethereal wave-motion, into the table, I can either make this force positive and draw the table away from the ground, or make it negative and thus neutralise the combined pulling force which you all exerted to raise the table. But this is merely a surmise. Future research may upset the theory altogether, or at any rate profoundly modify it. You see how ignorant I am. Nevertheless, although I cannot explain this force I have the power not only to move heavy bodies, but to cause instruments to play, and even apparently to create material bodies by causing the molecules of a body to leave it and to re-combine to form another body outside. Nor is this power confined to the immediate vicinity. I can affect bodies, and cause them to appear in phantom form at prodigious distances away. "You may well shrug your shoulders and shake your heads and smile, but you will be compelled to repeat what Tertullian wrote seventeen centuries ago, 'Certum est quia impossibile est.'"[1]

"Are these wonderful phenomena described in books?" asked Riche.

"Certainly," replied the professor, "they have been recorded in innumerable books for thousands of years past."

"I should like to study the subject," added Riche. "Can you recommend me a good text book to commence my studies with?"

"Begin by reading the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles," said Delapine with a smile.

"Are you serious, professor?" asked Riche.

"Never more so, I assure you. I know no better books to begin your studies with. Jesus Christ was not only en-

[1] It is true because it is impossible.

dowed with the greatest amount of psychic power the world has ever known, but all his disciples (with one important exception) were specially chosen for their mediumistic power. They failed to select psychists to replace them, and as they could not transmit the power, the moment they died all miracles, *i.e.*, supernormal phenomena ceased. And now, my dear Villebois, pray bring me another table and remove this broken one."

Villebois did as Delapine requested, and the guests sat down round it again.

"I feel the presence of some spirit," Delapine remarked. "Let us put our hands on the table and find out if it is so. Everyone present will please keep his feet at the back of the chair as no one must touch the table with his foot, even by accident."

Having assured himself that his instructions had been obeyed, he asked them all to join hands and to wait in silence.

After waiting patiently ten minutes a slight tremor shook the table.

"Three raps will mean 'yes,' two raps 'no.'

"Are there any spirits present?" asked Delapine.

Three knocks were heard and felt by all the sitters.

"What is your name?"

Slowly the raps spelt out M-a-r-i-a L-e-o-n-o-r-a.

"Maria Leonora, why, that is my dear mother's maiden name," whispered Renée to Villebois.

Again the raps spelt out M-a-r-i-a L-e-o-n-o-r-a.

The financier turned pale as death, while Renée trembled all over.

"I want Monsieur Delapine to retire to the cabinet, I think I can then collect power enough to appear and speak," was rapped out.

Delapine leaned over to Riche and whispered in his ear,

"Whatever you do, you must not disturb me nor touch any materialised form you may see without permission from the person. Get the camera ready and use your largest plate, and be prepared to expose by the magnesium light the instant when you get permission by the voice. Now put the red shade over the lamp and turn it down lower."

In the meantime Delapine entered the cabinet and lay down on the couch which was the sole piece of furniture inside it.

Immediately he fell into a kind of trance. The curtains were half open, and the guests could dimly observe him and hear his slow measured breathing.

Slowly a mist seemed to issue forth from the cabinet which gradually condensed into the outlines of a woman attired in a black silk dress with a white lace collar.

In a few seconds the form could be distinctly seen moving towards the guests. She approached Renée who recognised her in the dim light.

"Is that you, darling mother?" she cried, "you don't seem changed a bit."

"Yes, Renée, I am your mother, and you don't appear changed either, as I have seen you ever so many times since I passed over. I have often stood at your bedside and watched over you. Turn the lamp higher, I have power enough left to stand it for a few moments. But I must envelope myself in a white garment just to prevent the light from affecting me."

They turned the light up, and all the guests beheld the features of a beautiful woman with light golden-brown wavy hair, enveloped in a white gauze-like fabric.

"Pray don't touch me," she said to Payot, who tried to put his arms round her. "You will kill my medium if you do."

"What!" said Villebois, "Do you mean to say that it will injure M. Delapine?"

"Indeed it will," she replied, "but I cannot tell you the reason."

"Oh, my dear husband," she said, "promise me that you will be kind to my little Renée. Your conduct to her since I passed over has caused me such intense grief."

"I promise," said Payot, feeling heartily ashamed of himself.

"May I take a photograph with a flashlight?" enquired Riche.

"You may, but you will not see me any more, for it will cause my form to melt away. As it is, I can only stay a few minutes."

"Oh, mother dear," said Renée, "give me a kiss—just one kiss before you leave me."

"Do not be anxious, Renée. I shall see you again very soon. And now, sir, you may take my photograph as I am about to be called away."

Riche, having focussed the camera, pressed the ball, and a dazzling light followed as the magnesium powder blazed up.

Everyone saw the figure of Renée's mother and Delapine asleep behind her in the cabinet.

As the smoke dispersed, the guests observed the figure slowly melting away in the air.

She was gone.

A female voice was heard behind the curtain, "Au revoir, Renée, my child, I shall soon see you again."

Villebois turned up the light and looked into the cabinet. Delapine was sleeping like a child. He stepped up to the professor as if to wake him, but Riche remembering his orders, sprang forward and pulled him back.

"Don't let anyone wake Delapine," he cried. "He warned me to allow no one to disturb him, but to let him wake up naturally."

Suddenly Marcel called out, "Riche, Riche come here quickly. Don't you smell something?"

"Yes," said Riche, "you are right, there is something burning, I can smell it."

They both ran into the next room, and on opening the door found the landing full of dense smoke. Hurrying back they each took one of the girls by the arm and rushed out of the room and through the conservatory into the garden, followed by Payot, while Villebois ran after them with Madame Villebois on his arm. But they were all too concerned about their own safety to bestow a thought on the professor, who remained in the cabinet.

Villebois and Marcel, having seen the ladies safe in the summer-house, ran round to the garden gate and hurried to the nearest fire alarm, while the others ran to the house to ascertain the cause of the fire. Renée looked round and missed her lover.

"Henri! Henri!" she cried, "where are you? They have left him in the cabinet. O God be merciful!"

She ran after Riche in an agony of fear, "Quick, doctor, come and help me and get the professor away, he is asleep in the cabinet."

"My dear child, I dare not wake him; he told me on no account to disturb him, but we can stand by and remove him as soon as there is any danger. It will only be the work of a minute to carry him out into the garden. You need not be alarmed, there is nothing to fear." At this moment Céleste joined them.

"What can have caused the fire?" she asked.

"Oh, pray don't discuss that now. Let us set to work to put it out," said Riche.

"Do you think Pierre has had anything to do with this?"

"How could Pierre have done it? He is not in the house," replied Riche, "He left some time ago; don't you remember his telling us that he had to go to his office at once, and asking us to apologise to Madame Villebois for him?"

"Of course I do," replied Céleste, "but I am not so sure that he did leave the house."

"What do you mean?" asked Renée, who had heard her sister's remark.

"I am afraid he wants to harm Professor Delapine," said Céleste.

"Nonsense," cried Renée, "you surely don't mean to say he wants to injure Delapine?"

"No, no," said Riche, getting alarmed in turn, "she didn't mean that exactly, she merely meant to say—that we must set to work to extinguish the fire if we want to save the house. Now, mademoiselle, you go back to the summer-house with Céleste, and don't stir until I come back, and I promise you no harm shall come to Delapine. Meanwhile I will walk round the house."

With these words he left the two girls, and proceeded to assist the others in tracing the source of the fire.

"I wonder if there can be any truth in Céleste's remark," muttered Riche to himself. "No, no, what Céleste is saying is all nonsense, I will never believe it. I feel convinced that Pierre is in his chambers by this time."

On the day before the séance, Pierre had purchased a

quantity of shavings and a large bottle of naphtha together with some phosphorous which he dissolved in it.

"Ah," he said to himself, "this will make a famous blaze, and no one will be able to guess who did it."

On arriving at the house of Dr. Villebois some time after dinner on the evening of the séance, he availed himself of a favourable opportunity, at a moment when the servant was not looking, to deposit a small black bag in a corner of the hall. Just at the beginning of the Séance, as will be remembered, he slipped out of the room and recovering his bag from its hiding place, went cautiously upstairs to Riche's bedroom, taking extra precautions that no one should see him enter. Quickly making a small heap of the shavings under the bed, he soaked them with the mixture of naptha and phosphorous. Then making sure that everything was in order for his dastardly purpose he left the room as stealthily as he had entered it, noiselessly locking the door behind him, and placing the key in his pocket. "Now," he muttered, "I must get back to the 'spiritualists' and watch their movements from my place of vantage, and then mon brave Delapine, we shall see."

Pierre returned to the room adjoining the séance room, which opened into the conservatory, and taking up a position behind a curtain from where he could see what went on without being observed, he cautiously opened the little phial containing some of the liquid he had stolen from Paul's laboratory on the evening of his visit to the analyst, and proceeded to fill a small hypodermic syringe with the fluid.

"Confound that fire," he muttered. "It seems an uncommonly long time in starting. I'll sneak back and see if anything has gone wrong." No sooner had he opened the door of the dining-room, when he perceived the strong odour of burning wood and naptha, and looking up the stairs he observed a bluish cloud of smoke slowly making its way along the ceiling, and spreading down the stairs.

"That seems to be all right," he said to himself, as he returned to his hiding-place.

In about five minutes' time the smoke began slowly to

penetrate the room and make its way into the séance chamber.

"Keep calm, keep calm," he said to himself, as he heard a commotion among the guests in the adjoining room.

Peeping through the keyhole, Pierre saw the guests hurriedly rise up and rush out through the conservatory into the garden.

As soon as he had ascertained that the last person had left the room, he cautiously opened the door and crept into the séance room. He first adjusted the blinds of the conservatory window and door, so that no light could penetrate, and then turned up the lights sufficiently high to observe the professor in the cabinet. There he was, clear enough, sleeping as calmly as an infant.

Pierre cautiously looked round the room to make sure that no one was watching him, and when he had thoroughly satisfied himself on that point, he crept into the cabinet, and kneeling down beside the sleeping man, paused for a moment. A feeling of fear, almost amounting to terror, unnerved him for a few seconds, and then mentally upbraiding himself for his cowardice, he cautiously rolled back the professor's shirt sleeve and gently picked up a fold of the skin. Holding the injection syringe in his other hand, he thrust the point well home into the tissues.

The guests in the garden were suddenly startled by an exclamation from Riche.

"Look," he cried, pointing to his bedroom window out of which a wreath of dense smoke was curling.

"Follow me, there is the fire." The whole party ran round the garden into the house. Villebois flew to the telephone to hurry up the fire brigade, while the others hastened upstairs through the blinding smoke to the source of the mischief in Riche's bedroom. But the smoke was too suffocating to effect an entrance, and the guests stood on the landing half dazed with fear and excitement. They all tied handkerchiefs round their mouths, and following Riche's directions endeavoured to quench the flames.

Dr. Riche ran downstairs to obtain help, and passed Villebois, who was making his way to the bedroom through the smoke.

"Ma foi!" said Riche to himself, "I can't leave Delapine like this. I must get him out of the house in spite of what he said, whether he likes it or not," and putting his thoughts into practice he ran down into the dining room.

"I'll swear," he said to himself, "there is someone moving about in the séance room. I wonder who it can be. I thought everyone had gone into the garden. I must go and see who it is."

Pierre was just in the act of pushing the piston home when he heard someone walking towards the door of the Séance room. In his hurry he became nervous and his hand shook, so that the needle of the syringe broke off abruptly at the neck of the shaft.

"Damn," said Pierre to himself, as he flung the needle on one side. "I have only been able to inject a third of the contents of the syringe into his arm."

He let the syringe fall in his haste, and flew to the door, and throwing all his weight against it, managed to close it before he could be seen by the person opening it. Quickly turning the key in the lock, he ran to one of the side windows. To open it and vault on to the garden path was the work of an instant, and while Riche was endeavouring to force the door, Pierre had gained the garden gate, and had passed outside into the street. Quickly running along close to the garden wall, he turned down the corner of the first cross street, first looking back to make sure that he had not been followed.

"Lucky for me that no one saw me leave the house," he said to himself. "Anyhow, I have a good start, and I shall be able to get clean away without being seen."

Hailing a passing fiacre, he shouted to the cocher to stop, and opening the door he jumped in.

"Where shall I drive to?" asked the coachman.

"Drive straight on, and I will give you an address later on. Mais vite, vite!" he shouted, as looking through the small window at the back of the coach he caught sight of Riche running after him some distance behind.

"See, here is ten francs, and you shall have ten more if you will drive quickly."

The cocher, delighted at the idea of so large a pourboire, lashed his horse into a gallop, and the cab rapidly out-

distancing Riche, soon left him far behind and disappeared in the distance.

"Gee! that was a narrow shave, but no one recognised me, thank goodness. Another second and Riche must have seen me, but I was just too quick for him. I hope I have got that syringe about me." He felt in all his pockets, but could not find it anywhere.

"Oh! damn," he exclaimed, "that's awkward. I surely can't have left it in old Delapine's room. Yes, I must have dropped it when that fellow, whoever he was, came to the door. The worst of it is that someone is sure to find it. Well, never mind, it's got no needle in it, so they cannot see how it was used. Besides they might think it belonged to Riche or Villebois. Confound it. All this trouble comes through my helping the professor to see what the other world is like. On second thoughts I will call to-morrow and apologise for my having been obliged to run away to my chambers, and then I can find out how the land lies. I'll back my wits against theirs any day."

"Where shall I drive to now?" said the cocher, looking through the window.

"Oh! drive to the Café Américain. No, on second thoughts I prefer Maxim's."

The coachman turned his horse round and speedily found his way into the Rue Royale, where he drove to the place indicated.

"This is better," said Pierre to himself. "Jolly good thing I had the sense not to tell him to drive to my diggings, as they might have found out the cocher's number, and got to know where he drove me." Pierre paid the cocher, and pushed his way through the great wheeling door with its plate glass leaves into the well-known café. The musicians had just recommenced playing, and taking a seat he looked around him, scowling, and feeling as angry and miserable as he could be. A double stream of men and women kept constantly passing in and out through the revolving doors which reminded one of a Nile-steamer's paddle-wheel on end. A faint sickly smell of cigarette smoke mingled with violet powder and patchouli and the vinous breath of a hundred human beings filled the air. The whole room was a babel of

voices. At one end of the room were a group of men and elegantly dressed ladies drinking their café noir or sipping iced drinks through straws.

An American with his companion—obviously a young Englishman—entered at this moment.

"What a scene," said the younger as he peered around him. "Why, it's nothing else but a beastly phallic temple. I feel absolutely ashamed to be here."

"Well, I guess I don't agree. See there," and he pointed to a respectable bourgeois citizen who had just sat down at one of the little marble tables with his wife and daughter on either side of him. Why, they are only here for some music and coffee. They might be part of a Fifth Avenue congregation in a New York church. They certainly have no consciousness of immorality, and they seem ridiculously happy and contented. That sort of thing is quite impossible in my country, or yours either I guess. We are conscious of the presence of vice all the time, and console ourselves by feeling 'onco guid' as the Scotch say, whereas here in France they certainly make vice charming. No one observes anything immoral or improper in this place, and that is why everybody is happy and gay, and enjoys himself to the full. We Americans and Englishmen take our pleasures too seriously, and that is why we are nothing but a congregation of highly moral rakes. Virtue after all is merely a want of opportunity, and because the opportunity is to be found here, we set the place down as immoral. But we forget it is we who are immoral not the place. You English imagine that everybody will be damned who does not act or think exactly as you do. You forget that Paris has made pleasure and its pursuit a fine art. After six in the evening the entire town is engaged in nothing else. What do you suppose all these telegraph boys are hurrying around with 'petite bleus' for all day long except to enable Marie for four sous to inform her Alphonse that she is quite alone as her father has just left the house, or to warn Raoul or Charles that he must put off his visit to-night because her husband has unexpectedly returned from the country. My dear sir, I assure you that this great city is absorbed in toil all day long merely to procure the necessary money

to purchase diamonds for Madame, to buy a new hat for Suzanne, or to pay the rent of Marguerite's flat in the Rue Pigalle."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the young Englishman, "I had no idea that such shocking escapades went on."

"Perhaps that may be so, but it is all the more reason why you want to do them."

"But surely, my dear sir! you don't imagine for a moment that I would———"

"Yes, you may well say that, you old humbug," he interrupted, "but I can see by your eyes that you are just as bad as any of them," and the American nudged him and laughed heartily.

A pretty girl, charmingly dressed in evening costume, sided up to them at this moment, all laughter with sparkling eyes that beamed with merriment. "A bien venue mes enfants, allon boire un coup avec nous," and she dropped a little curtsey.

The American bowed politely and lead his companion away. But the younger one turned his head round and looked at her and smiled back.

"Oh, my dear fellow, do let's go and join her."

"I thought you were superior to all that sort of thing."

"Oh, well I've changed my mind."

"So soon!" said the elder, and shaking with laughter, yielded to his wishes. Immediately the two, arm in arm, turned round and followed her to her table as meekly as lambs.

"Say, sonny, we'll sit down right here with this little daisy and enjoy ourselves, I guess we'll have some fun presently."

The younger one blushed up to the roots of his hair, but did not apparently offer the slightest opposition.

The whole room glowed with the rosy light of countless electric candles which stood on every table. These were thronged with rows of fashionably dressed couples all talking, laughing, and drinking, between which waiters in evening dress struggled to force a passage, holding trays covered with dishes and iced drinks high above their heads.

Pierre cautiously glanced around and then sat down. In front of him were three men, evidently Frenchmen, who were talking simultaneously in very loud tones and

laughing immoderately. At another table were four girls in evening dress drinking iced champagne, and turning their heads to gaze at every lady and gentleman who entered. A smartly dressed lady, whom he heard addressed as Julie by the other three sat with them. She was adorned with superb jewelry and had on a perfectly fitting gown. Undoubtedly very attractive, her finely cut features, brilliant eyes and marble-like complexion irresistably attracted Pierre, who seeing her glance boldly at him, bowed slightly as he held his glass to his lips. This was sufficient encouragement for her, so with a slight inclination of her head she gathered up her dress and came and sat opposite him.

He at once called one of the waiters and ordered a bottle of champagne. Julie tried to draw him into a conversation, but Pierre was too perturbed to pay much attention to her, and she could see that it was almost an effort for him to be polite.

A woman with a basket of flowers and chocolates done up in little packages with coloured silk ribbons, observed Pierre speaking to her, and immediately came up to them, and asked the lady if she would like a bunch of violets. Julie smiled and looked at the lawyer with one of those oblique seductive glances so characteristic of the born coquette.

Pierre tried to look interested and smiled back with a slight nod.

"The violets are only three francs each, lady, but then the lady must have a box of chocolates also."

Julie took up one bunch after another and apparently was delighted with their perfume, for she ordered the woman to collect the whole lot of bunches and wrap them up in a large paper parcel, and took one of the largest chocolate boxes as well. Julie thanked Pierre for the flowers, and leisurely opened the box and proceeded to eat a few of the creams.

Pierre, who had been too absorbed to follow what had been going on, was suddenly startled by the woman asking him to pay for the entire parcel of flowers, and chocolates.

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer as the woman demanded eighty-five francs, "I don't understand you. Do you expect

me to pay over four louis for those worthless flowers? Do you take me for a damned fool or what?"

"That is the correct price, monsieur, I cannot accept less."

Pierre stared at her like a search-light, while his lips assumed an amused and sarcastic smile.

Julie looked at Pierre and tapped impatiently on the ground with her beaded slipper, as Pierre, putting his hand in his pocket, drew out a varied collection of gold and silver coins. He looked at them thoughtfully for a moment, and then apparently changing his mind, rose up and deliberately walked past her, without turning his head, to a table in another part of the room.

"Beast," hissed the siren, as she turned round and glared at him with clenched fingers. "I shall pay you out for this."

But the compliment was quite lost on Pierre.

He had no sooner sat down than the woman with the flowers went up to him.

"Monsieur has forgotten to pay for the flowers and chocolates that he bought for the lady."

"I never bought anything for her; just go and tell her to pay for them herself."

The flower seller went up to the manager, who straightway came over to where Pierre was sitting.

"Pardon, monsieur, I understand that monsieur bought some flowers and chocolates for the lady over there."

"I did nothing of the sort. Look here, monsieur," he added, "if this woman gives me any more of her cheek I will inform the police."

Several people got up from their seats, and a crowd began to collect. The music which was in full swing suddenly ceased abruptly. Ultimately the lady, seeing that there was no help for it, settled the bill.

"Ah, coquin," she said, shaking her finger at Pierre, "you shall pay this little bill many times over before I have done with you, just wait and see."

Pierre settled down in one of the cosy corners, and ordering a petit verre of absinthe, became absorbed in a copy of *Le Soir*.

Julie's fit of temper caused a flush of colour to spread

over her cheeks, which greatly increased her charms, and Pierre, who happened to glance up from his newspaper, could not help admiring her, and tried to attract her attention once more, but she disdainfully turned her head aside. After hesitating for a few moments Julie called one of the waiters, who was evidently on intimate terms with her, and whispered something in his ear. He gave a slight nod and returned to his work. Nearly an hour passed; and Pierre, feeling tired, put on his hat, and after waiting outside for a few minutes hailed a fiacre and drove to his chambers.

Had he looked back he would have seen a man running swiftly behind his carriage.

CHAPTER XIV

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE

Chi rende alla meschina
La sua felicità*

Oh! what a noble heart was here undone,
When Science self destroyed her favourite son!
Yes, she too much indulged thy fond pursuit,
She sowed the seeds, but death hath reaped the fruit.
BYRON, on the death of Kirke White.

Concurritur: horae
Momento cità mors venit. *Horace*, S. I. 1. 7.

As Riche turned the handle of the drawing-room door it was violently shut in his face. He tried to turn the handle again, but the pressure behind was too great, and before he could force the door he heard the key click in the lock.

The doctor hurled himself against it several times, but the door was well made and would not yield.

"There is some mischief going on inside," he said to himself, and shouted to Villebois to come and help him. Fortunately with his assistance they managed to burst the door open. As he entered he looked round the room.

"I say, Villebois, this is a suspicious state of things. The conservatory blinds are down and the gaslights are burning, while the window is wide open. Evidently the bird has flown. Quick, follow me, we may catch the fellow yet," and so saying he dashed through the dining-room into the hall, and out of the front door into the street, followed by the rest.

Being the most active of them all, Riche arrived at the

* Ah, who will give the lost one her vanished dream of bliss?

corner of the cross-street first, just in time to see the door of a fiacre shut, and to watch it drive off at a gallop.

"I saw the villain close the door of the fiacre," he said out of breath to Villebois and Marcel, who had caught him up, "but I was just too late to make out who he was. But no matter, we shall lay our hands on him yet."

Evidently it was quite impossible to overtake the fiacre, so after shaking their fists in the direction of the retreating vehicle they all retraced their steps to the drawing-room. They looked around and saw Delapine sleeping peacefully on his couch.

"I wonder," said Marcel, "why the conservatory blinds are drawn?"

"I can't imagine," replied Villebois. "But see, the window is wide open. The villain must have escaped through it."

"Mon Dieu, what is this?" said Riche, picking up a hypodermic syringe. "It is two-thirds full of some fluid. We will keep this liquid gentlemen, its contents may prove extremely useful."

Procuring a small empty phial, he poured the contents into it, and corking it up put it into his pocket. "Ah, here is the needle," he added, as he picked it up from the floor. "It is evidently broken too, and the fracture appears quite recent."

"Riche, come here," said Villebois, looking at Delapine, "do you notice anything unusual about him?"

Riche stood with folded arms, gazing silently at the professor. He gently shook him, but found that there was no responsive movement in the body. Delapine's face had the appearance of marble, and when Riche raised one of the arms it dropped down again motionless. No sign of pulsation could be detected at the wrist. Riche took up a match and waved it in front of the sleeper's eyes. He watched them carefully, but the pupils failed to respond.

Dr. Riche was completely nonplussed. Although he was accustomed to see death in all its varying forms, both in the hospitals and in the battle-field, without his professional calmness being in any way perturbed, a sudden horror at the awful fate of his friend seized him as he bent over the body. He became ashy pale, and trembling like

an aspen leaf he cried out aloud, "Oh! my God, Delapine is dead."

Riche carefully examined the parts of the body which were exposed, and opened his shirt, but failed to discover any signs of injury. Just as he was about to relinquish his search he noticed a spot on one of the arms.

"Hullo," he cried, "what's this?" and pulling out a pocket magnifier he scrutinized a small red spot a short distance above the wrist. "Come here, Villebois, and tell me what you think of this."

Villebois took the magnifier out of Riche's hand, and carefully examined the spot. He looked up in an enquiring manner as if he expected Riche to speak for him.

"Well, what do you make of it?" said Riche as he looked at him with a peculiar expression and curl of the mouth which he always wore when he knew beforehand what the answer would be.

"Tell me, what is it?" he repeated as Villebois hesitated.

"I think it is a hypodermic puncture. Isn't that your opinion?"

"I don't think anything about it, I am sure of it; and what's more I feel convinced it was made with the needle found on the floor. The rascal was evidently injecting the poison at the very moment when we interrupted him as he was trying to open the door. Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes, you are perfectly right," said Villebois, nodding his head. "How fortunate you were to find the syringe, and half full of the poison too. Don't lose the fluid whatever you do. It appears to me to be the key to the whole mystery."

"You trust me," said Riche, "I am not going to let the matter drop, my little bottle will bring the scoundrel to the guillotine yet." Meanwhile the firemen had arrived, and as there was an abundance of water, the fire was soon under control. Although the contents of Riche's room were destroyed, no damage was done outside it except by the water. On entering the room the firemen smelt the pungent odour of burnt naphtha, and a few shavings still glowing with the heat were to be seen in a corner of the room.

"Ei! Ei! this is the work of an incendiary," said one of the firemen. "Regardez-la, monsieur," he said to Villebois whom he knew by sight, holding up some of the half-burnt shavings, "don't you smell the naphtha?"

"I do, but mon Dieu, this is terrible," said Villebois, "We must send for the police at once, there's a crime here. It must be investigated at all costs."

Villebois ran to the telephone and called for the police to come immediately, while the firemen, now satisfied that the fire was extinguished, proceeded to take the hose-pipe out of the house. In a few minutes they had departed, leaving Villebois and his guests alone in the house looking at one another and wondering what it all meant.

Meanwhile Renée and Céleste, unable to control their anxiety, disobeyed Riche's instructions and ran back into the séance room where they met Riche bending over the professor.

"What is the matter with Delapine?" they both cried with a look of terror on their faces.

Riche looked very sad and distressed, but said nothing.

"Oh! doctor, do tell me, is there anything the matter?" said Renée, staring at him with her great eyes wide open.

"I am afraid so," said Riche in a subdued voice.

"You don't surely mean—that he is dead?" Renée asked in a broken voice, becoming deadly pale. "Oh, doctor, tell me quickly, what is the matter?"

"My poor girl—he is dead," he replied very solemnly.

"What!—what did you say, doctor? Dead! no—no—it can't be true."

Renée looked at his face half doubting, half believing, and then turning her face towards Delapine she flung her arms round him, and covered his face with kisses in an agony of grief.

"Henri! Henri! come back, come back to me, oh my beloved!" and she burst into tears, while her whole frame shook convulsively.

Céleste sobbed in sympathy, and even Riche, usually so calm, wiped away a tear.

Villebois looked at Renée with a puzzled expression mingled with sadness.

"Come, my poor little Renée," he said at length.

"Wake up, my child; this grief will do you no good;" and he gently patted her head and kissed her; but Renée never moved.

The professor lay before them in the calm sleep of death. He looked unearthly yet beautiful with his serene, peaceful smile, like some newly created being, quietly waiting for the breath of life to be transformed into a living soul. Those penetrating eyes of his seemed to be piercing through the Veil into the Unseen Universe. All traces of pain and sorrow had vanished. One might almost fancy him quietly biding his time for the Easter Morn with a sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection. Where was that noble spirit, that great master mind which for years had been unfolding the secrets of nature, and directing its unalterable laws into channels of usefulness for the benefit of untold generations to come? All around him the clang and din of life could be heard, the murmur of many voices sounding like some confused discord breaking through the leaves of the forest, while here he lay resembling some marble effigy carved by a master hand. Was his spirit gazing with a prophetic eye through the half-opened portal of death on the vista of heaven unfolded before him, or was he joining the music of an angelic choir, or listening to the clinging memories of some half forgotten tale of happy childhood? Dead to him were all the wranglings of jealousy, the bitterness of malice, the aching heart, and the ceaseless strife. That mighty unselfish soul overflowing with love and goodwill to all, cheerful amid despair, unconquered by obstacles, unfaltering in its duty—where was it now? And the answer, like the echo of death, came back, "Toll for the mighty dead, he is no more, his soul is gone for ever."

Céleste silently slipped out of the room, and then ran as quickly as she could and told the others. They all hurried into the chamber, Céleste leading the way.

"Oh, papa," she cried, "whatever shall we do, isn't it dreadful? My poor darling sister, it will kill her, I know it will. You don't know how she loved him," and she knelt down at the foot of the couch and sobbed convulsively.

Villebois looked at Payot who was nervously twisting

his fingers, while at the same time his face betrayed the conflict of emotions struggling within him.

It was true the obstacle to Payot's scheme was at length removed, and for a moment a feeling of satisfaction thrilled him, but an instant after, the latent affection for his only daughter, which Delapine had succeeded in fanning into a feeble flame, awoke a better feeling in his heart, and the sight of her unutterable grief met with a speedy response in his better nature.

He bent down and tenderly kissed his daughter.

Renée turned her head up to her father with a look of surprise, as she was quite unaccustomed to receive any tokens of affection from him.

"Villebois, mon cher," said Payot looking at him, "I hear someone knocking loudly at the door of the house."

Villebois immediately went out of the room, and François ran up to him in an excited manner.

"Monsieur le Commissaire de Police with two sergeants have arrived, and demand admittance in the name of the law; what am I to do?"

"Show them immediately into the library, and tell them I will be with them in a moment."

When Villebois entered the library a little gentleman, faultlessly attired in black, with a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, walked up to meet him.

"I have the honour to address Monsieur le Docteur Villebois, I presume?" said the little man as he presented his card.

Villebois took the proffered card which bore the inscription :—

ADOLPHE BIRON,
COMMISSAIRE DE POLICE.

"Monsieur le docteur," said the little man with a slight bow, "I have come in answer to the telephone message, from which I understand that there has been a fire here, and that it is probably the work of an incendiary."

"Pardon, monsieur, who told you that?"

"One of the firemen who assisted in extinguishing the flames—am I right in my suspicions?"

"Perfectly," replied Villebois, "but that is only a trifle."

"Only a trifle?" replied Monsieur Biron, astonished. "Arson is not regarded as a trifling matter by the law."

"That is so, but I fear a murder has been committed as well."

"Oh! oh!! oh!!!" cried the commissaire in an ascending scale, tapping his two fingers on the table.

He remained silent for a few moments, and then he called his two satellites. "You, Georges, go round to the front gate, and you, Raoul, go to the back of the house and see that no one passes out without my permission.

"Now, Monsieur Villebois, let us go together and see the victim."

They stepped carefully across the wet, slippery floor, and entered the séance room in silence.

Monsieur Biron went up to Delapine's body and carefully examined him.

"He is quite dead," he remarked; "as to that there can only be one opinion."

Then, turning to Villebois, he asked him the names and addresses of all the guests, and entered them in his official memorandum book.

"These are all guests of mine," said Villebois, "I will make myself responsible for them."

"Good," replied the commissaire. "Let them please retire into the next room, while we go into the matter privately here."

Dr. Riche took Monsieur Biron aside in order to acquaint him with the true facts of the case and of his struggle at the door, but the Commissaire of Police interrupted him impatiently.

"Pardon, monsieur, but I am on duty, and you will please excuse me if I listen to you later."

"Allow me to present my card, monsieur le commissaire. I am Dr. Riche. I was witness of——"

"I regret, monsieur le docteur, but I cannot allow you to interfere with me in my investigations."

"Excuse me, monsieur, I am the only person who saw——"

"Please do not interrupt me, monsieur le docteur."

"But time is of the greatest importance," said Dr. Riche, "and I can assist——"

"For the last time I shall be obliged if you will postpone your explanation," said the little man with an air of official importance, and he looked him up and down through his spectacles, until poor Riche felt half convinced that he himself must in some way or other have committed the crime.

"But, monsieur," interposed Villebois, "my friend, Dr. Riche, saw——"

"Pardon me, but I must request you to stop talking," he replied, becoming at length really angry; "you are here to answer questions and not to speak to me."

Villebois, somewhat nettled at being addressed in this style, was about to remonstrate, but the fierce glance of the commissaire took his breath away, and he stammered out something incoherently, and finally collapsed utterly cowed.

"Now I must request you all to be good enough to retire immediately into the next room, and not to move until I call you," said Monsieur Biron as he ordered the guests off with a majestic wave of the hand, "and you, Dr. Villebois, will remain here with me."

"Are you acquainted with the deceased?" he enquired of Villebois as soon as they were alone.

"He has been my guest for three months now, and is my most intimate friend."

"And his name?"

"Professor Henri Delapine."

"What!" he exclaimed, "Professor Delapine, the renowned professor at the Sorbonne?"

"The same."

"Mon Dieu! he was one of the most amiable men I ever had the good fortune to meet. What reason could anyone have to seek his death? But that we can go into later. How long has he been dead?"

"I cannot say. All that I know is that he was alive and well a little more than half an hour ago."

"Half an hour ago," said Monsieur Biron, astonished; "but what could have killed him?"

"That is what I want to know."

"This is a most extraordinary affair. Let us examine his body at once."

Villebois and the commissaire proceeded carefully to strip him, scrutinising each garment as they removed it with the utmost care.

"I see no marks of violence," said Biron as he examined the corpse from head to foot. "What makes you think that he has been killed? Can it not be a simple case of heart failure?" and the commissaire gave him a searching look.

"That is possible," replied Villebois, "but apparently not from natural causes."

"Then you mean to say that he really has been murdered?"

"I am sure of it."

"Be careful what you say, doctor. It is a very terrible statement to make, and you will have to be confronted with the Juge d' Instruction, who will compel you to prove it or suffer the consequences."

Dr. Villebois looked very frightened at the severe glances of Monsieur Biron, and twisted his fingers together nervously. "I have every reason to suspect it," he said in a tone of apology. "Have you examined his arms, monsieur?"

The commissaire looked at Villebois to see if he were joking with him, and being convinced of his earnestness, he took up each arm in turn and examined them with great care on all sides.

"I see nothing, nothing at all," he replied.

"Look here, monsieur," said Villebois, pointing to a little swollen spot just above the wrist of the left arm. "Do you see that?"

Monsieur Biron looked at it carefully, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Cen'est rien, monsieur; it is only a mosquito bite."

Villebois examined it with a pocket magnifier, and gently squeezed it. A drop of glistening fluid came out tinged with blood. The commissaire at once became intensely interested. "Lend me the glass," he cried, and impatiently taking it from Villebois, he carefully examined the spot.

"H'm," he muttered, "the puncture is certainly too large for an insect to make. Can you account for it,

doctor?" he said, relinquishing for the first time his authoritative tone.

"I can, but Dr. Riche whom you saw just now can tell you more about it than I can. It was Dr. Riche who told me that he had heard someone moving about the room, and when the doctor ran to the door, before he could open it wide enough to see who was inside, it was violently shut in his face and locked. Dr. Riche and myself together managed to force the door, only to find that the rascal had escaped. Riche raced after him, but the fellow was too quick, and before Riche could get near enough to recognise him, he had disappeared in a fiacre."

"Mon Dieu, but why didn't you tell me all this before?" asked M. Biron.

"Monsieur, I could not, as the whole affair has altogether unnerved me. Besides, Dr. Riche was about to tell you, but you stopped him, if you remember, and threatened to arrest him if he spoke."

The little man stamped on the ground with vexation and chagrin.

"Well, well," he replied somewhat mollified, "I trust it is not too late yet; bring him here at once."

Villebois opened the door and beckoned to him to come in. Riche had taken the commissaire's conduct so much to heart that at first he refused to answer.

"A thousand pardons, M. le docteur, for appearing so rude," said the commissaire in a very apologetic tone, "but I understand that you are able to give some clue to this assassination?"

Dr. Riche, seeing that M. Biron's apology was sincere, slowly thawed and became more amiable.

"Yes, monsieur," he replied, "I came downstairs during the fire to look after the professor, who was fast asleep on a couch, and just as I was about to enter the chamber, the door was shut in my face and locked. When I entered the room the bird had flown, but I picked up a hypodermic syringe half full of liquid, from the floor."

"But didn't you try to find the fellow?"

"Of course I did. I ran round the house into the street, and on arriving at the first corner I saw a man entering a cab, but he was half inside, and too far away

for me to recognise who he was. I ran as hard as I could, and shouted to the cocher, but he lashed his horse into a gallop and disappeared. When I returned to the house I searched the room again, and found the broken injection needle on the floor, and guessing that there was some connection between this needle and Professor Delapine's condition, I examined him and discovered that life was extinct."

"Excellent, excellent," said the commissaire, delighted, and rubbing his hands together as if he had heard a good story.

"Parbleu," he cried, "but, mon ami, this is exceedingly interesting, perfectly romantic. Ah, mon cher docteur, our task grows more and more delightful. I must instruct my attendants this instant," and excusing himself he ran off as fast as his little legs could carry him. In the midst of his haste, however, a sudden thought struck him, and he returned to Dr. Villebois, and taking him on one side asked:

"Can you tell me, doctor, what was the cause of the fire?"

"It was undoubtedly a case of arson," replied Villebois and Riche together.

"Why do you think so?" enquired the commissaire.

"One of the firemen found a handful of half-burnt shavings in a corner of Dr. Riche's room which smelt strongly of petroleum, indeed the whole atmosphere reeked of it."

"Let us go to the room at once," said M. Biron.

On arriving at Riche's room they found the place in a terrible state. Everything was saturated with water, and all the contents were charred, and had been piled up by the firemen in a heap. As Dr. Villebois had said, the place reeked of naphtha and bore traces of having been intentionally set on fire.

"I understand it all," said Riche. "Someone has set fire to my bedroom in order to draw the guests away from the séance room, so that he might have a free hand to inject the poison unobserved into the arm of the sleeping professor."

"Ha, ha, you are a born detective, Dr. Riche. Nothing

can be clearer," and the commissaire adjusted his spectacles to his entire satisfaction. "A sprat to catch a mackerel, eh?" and he positively beamed with professional pride.

M. Biron, having made his inspection of the house, and cross-questioned all the guests without obtaining any fresh information, cordially shook hands with the two doctors and departed, bubbling over with zeal, and feeling intoxicated with the importance of his mission.

CHAPTER XV

DR. RICHE MAKES A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY

Dal sonno a la morte e un picciol varco. [1]
(*Tasso Gerusalemme Liberata*, ix. 18.)

Perir non lascia chi perir non merita. [2]
(*Alfieri Fillipo*, Act iv. Sc. 5.)

"We are of such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep. [3]

On entering the adjoining apartment Villebois and Riche ran to the assistance of Renée who was lying on the sofa in a dead faint. Madame Villebois was busy applying the usual restoratives, while Payot in a terrible state of excitement had just rushed out of the room to search for a bottle of brandy. On opening the door he literally fell into the arms of François and the other domestics, who had collected round the door to try and discover what was going on.

"Eavesdropping, Hein!" he cried. "How dare you leave your duties and gossip like this. Be off with you. Here, François, show me at once where you keep the brandy," and seizing him by the arm they ran to the cellar to fetch it.

Meanwhile Céleste, half scared to death, was kneeling beside Renée, chafing her cold bloodless hands, while she looked up through her tears at the other guests who were assembled round the couch, and conversing in excited tones.

Villebois and Riche gently pushed them aside, and taking Renée in their arms, carried her up to bed.

[1] Small is the gulf that lies twixt life and death.
[2] Ne'er heaven permits that he should die who does not merit death.
[3] The Tempest.

"We can do nothing more to-night," said Villebois, consulting his watch, "see how late it is, and we shall have a heavy day to-morrow."

At length one by one the tired guests departed to their respective rooms.

"Monsieur Payot," said Villebois, "I cannot let you leave to-night. If you don't mind I will make you up a bed in the library."

"Do you mind, colleague," said Riche, "if I sleep in the séance-room."

"My dear Riche, I cannot permit you to sleep in a room with a dead body. Why can't you go to your own room?"

"I am accustomed to be in the presence of death as you know; and my room is all burnt out."

"Oh yes, I forgot that. But won't you have a bed made up here?"

"No, please, doctor, come here a moment," and he drew him aside, "I have my reasons for sleeping in the room with Delapine," and he added something in a whisper.

Villebois opened his eyes widely and nodded.

"Oh! oh! I understand now," he said, looking very alarmed. "Yes, sleep there by all means."

Riche had a bed made up on the floor close by the side of Delapine's body, and turning down the light, got into bed.

In spite of the fact that he was dead tired with the excitement and horror of the recent events, his mind was so distracted that he could not sleep. Although his body was weary, his thoughts became abnormally active, and he kept tossing in bed, and turning over in his mind the strange events he had witnessed.

"Happy Delapine," he said with a sigh, "Death indeed is the only evil that can never touch us. When we are, death is not. When death comes, we are not, Yes, Cicero was right when he said, 'Death is an event either to be entirely disregarded, if it extinguish the soul's existence, or, much to be wished, if it convey it to some region where it shall continue to exist forever.' What then have I to fear, if after death I shall either not be miserable, or shall certainly be happy?"

His thoughts carried him back to the beautiful Greek

conception of death with its white marble tomb, and the mourners dressed in pure white, carrying garlands of flowers, and chanting some soul-stirring refrain accompanied by maidens playing on the harp and lute. He compared it with a shudder to the gruesome pictures of the Middle Ages, which he remembered to have seen in the frescoes of Orcagna on the walls of the Campo Santo in Pisa, which depicted the dying souls of the damned thrust into the pit of Hell by devils, or the souls of the saved (!) writhing in the flames of Purgatory, and whose torments could alone be alleviated by donations deposited in the money box by their friends on earth.

The moon's rays shining through the window shed a soft light through the room, and illuminated the wax-like features of the professor.

Once or twice Riche raising himself up in bed thought he saw a faint twitching in Delapine's fingers, but after gazing intently at them he lay down again convinced that he had been deceived.

Strange thoughts flitted through his mind. How very different would have been his life during the past week, he said to himself, had Villebois not met him at the café at the corner of the Boulevard S. Michel. What would he be doing now? Perhaps sleeping in his hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, perhaps risking a handful of louis on the green tables of the Casino, but almost certainly not tossing on a bed by the side of a corpse.

The room felt uncanny. He had long been familiar with death in all its forms. He had been surgeon in two campaigns in the north of Africa, and had seen his comrades die like flies around him from dysentery and cholera. He had seen their bodies thrown into pits a hundred at a time, but never had he felt such a feeling of awe and terror steal over him as he felt to-night. He could not account for it. Delapine would not needlessly hurt a fly, and now he was lying in the cold hands of death.

At length he could stand it no longer, and getting up he dressed himself and paced up and down the room.

Again he gazed intently on Delapine's face, and thought he detected a slight movement of the muscles. Was he mistaken? How could it be possible? Delapine was

undoubtedly dead, he said to himself. Riche's face broke out into a cold sweat, and he attempted to cry out, but his voice died away in silence. No; he lifted up the professor's arms, but they fell down again by their own weight. The clouds flitting across the moon alternately hid and revealed her light, and the black shadows in the room seemed as if they formed themselves into imps and monsters. The stillness became awful. Would the morning never break? Only the clock on the mantel-shelf spoke. Tick-tack, tick-tack, it repeated in a monotonous tone, but no sound answered back. He heard a noise outside, and creeping up to the window, opened it and listened. Too-hoot, too-hoot, it sounded. "It is only the hooting of an owl in the garden," he said, as he shut the window and lay down on the sofa. Doctor Riche's thoughts wandered back again to the café and to Mademoiselle Violette and her ring. What was it she told him when she steadily gazed on it? "I must try and refresh my memory," he said to himself. "I think a sip of brandy might help me," and acting on the impulse he turned up the light, and entering the next room poured out a liqueur glass of the brandy which François had brought for Renée.

"Ah! That does one good," he said as he poured out a second glass. "I recollect perfectly now the very words she said. I remember her telling me that she saw a house in one of the suburbs of Paris.

"'Yes,' she said, 'I see a large room which opens into a smaller room. I see a number of people sitting down in a half circle. There are'—what was it she said? Oh! I remember—'there are five men and three ladies.' I recollect the number perfectly, because at the time it flashed across my mind that there were exactly the same five men and three women figures in a Noah's Ark I gave to my nephew last New Year's day. Ma foi! but that is curious. The number corresponds exactly to the number of guests who were at the séance last night. Let me see. There were Villebois, Payot, Delapine, Marcel, and myself—five men; and Madame, Céleste and Renée—three ladies."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "that is a very curious coincidence, and I remember now she said one of the men had a pointed black beard, and they were putting him to

sleep. And then someone suddenly cried out: 'Oh! God, he is dead.' Why, that fits Delapine like a glove. Oh yes, and I recollect now she spoke of a large envelope sealed with four or five seals—I forget which—in a drawer, or writing-table, or secretary or something, I must hunt around for it as soon as I have had breakfast. Céleste will be only too pleased to help me. Of course it is all nonsense—but still as the first part of her version fits so well, it is just worth while seeing whether any other part will prove true."

At length fatigue proved too much for him, and flinging himself down on his bed, he fell into a deep slumber.

It was not until François brought the café au lait to his bedside next morning that Riche awoke.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it's ten o'clock."

"Oui, monsieur," said François, "I came to call you three times, but you were so fast asleep that I did not have the heart to wake you."

"And the others?" enquired Riche.

"They are all fast asleep too."

"I don't wonder after all we have gone through."

"Ah! monsieur, it is terrible," said François, and he shook his head solemnly. "I have been in Doctor Villebois' service seventeen years now, and never have I spent a night so horrible as this one."

"Yes, François. What Bossuet said in his great funeral oration will apply equally well here. 'O nuit désastreuse! O nuit effroyable! ou retentit tout-à-coup comme un éclat de tonnerre cette étonnante nouvelle. Monsieur est mort.'"

"Ah, mon Dieu! Monsieur le professor was indeed a good man. He will go straight to heaven without any purgatory."

"Are you sure that he will go to heaven?" asked Riche with a smile at the worthy man's earnestness.

"Oh! I think so, I think so. You will pardon me for speaking so plainly, mon docteur, but there is a difficulty, yes, just a little difficulty. You see he never went to Mass, or even to church, but then he was so noble and so good to the poor, that he would be certain to go to Paradise. Of course the good God would be obliged to give him a little purgatory as a mere matter of form just to keep up

appearances, but He would be sure to let him out at the end of an hour or two. Don't you think so, mon docteur?"

"Let us hope so," said Riche fervently, but with a slight shrug of the shoulders, as François bowed and left the room.

In a little while the servant returned with a message. "My master requests you to be good enough to come and see him as soon as possible," said François, as Riche was putting the finishing touches to his toilette.

"Tell your master I will be with him in a few minutes."

"Ah, my dear Riche," said Villebois, as the doctor entered the parlour, "I want you to come to Renée's room and hold a consultation with me. I fear the poor child has taken Delapine's death too much to heart. She appears to be heart-broken, and is making herself ill with sobbing. Anyone could see that she was fond of him, but I had no idea that she loved him to this degree. It is really very touching, n'est-ce pas?"

They found poor Renée lying in bed, her face flushed with fever, and moaning as if in pain. Her maid had applied ice compresses to her head, and she barely noticed the doctors as they entered the room. At length Villebois persuaded her to sit up, and take a little nourishment.

"By the way, mademoiselle, did Delapine ever give you any packets or letters to take care of for him?" said Riche.

"Yes, doctor, two days ago he gave me a large envelope and told me to take care of it for him, and to be sure and open it the moment he was dead. I was very frightened at what he said, and asked him to explain what he meant, but he merely shook his head and assured me there was no need for alarm, and all he asked me to promise was to carry out his instructions."

"But you have not carried them out, my child," said Villebois, smiling.

"Oh, doctor, how could I? I have been so ill and worried I have been unable to think of anything at all."

"Well, never mind," said Riche consolingly, "fortunately no harm has been done. Do you remember what the envelope looked like?"

"It was sealed with large red seals."

"What," cried Riche, bounding up from his seat as if he had been shot, "did you say it was sealed?"

"Yes, doctor, it had five seals in wax."

"Diable!" cried Riche in such an excited tone of surprise that Villebois thought he must be out of his senses. "Tell me quick where it is."

"You will find it in my writing-desk, doctor," said Renée, alarmed at his excited manner. "What do you want it for?"

"I must have it—I mean, may I bring it to you?"

"Certainly, if you wish to, doctor."

Dr. Riche on hearing this hastily left the room in a great state of excitement.

"What is the matter with him?" asked Renée, "why is he so eager to get the packet? It is merely a trifle after all."

"I have no idea, but I will go and see for myself."

As Villebois was leaving the room, the servant met him, and whispered something in his ear as he handed him a card.

"Shut the door quickly," said Villebois in a low tone. "We must not on any account let mademoiselle hear about it."

He followed the servant into the library where a gentleman advanced to meet him.

"I am sent from the parquet with orders from the representative of the Procureur de la République to carry out an autopsy on the body of Monsieur le Professor Delapine."

"Good," replied Villebois, "pray step this way."

Doctor Roux, for that was his name, entered the séance room armed with a large black bag, from which he withdrew a white apron extending below his knees with long sleeves, and an array of instruments and dishes.

Placing the latter on a table near at hand, he removed his coat, and attired himself in his apron. He began operations by displaying an immense amount of zeal and activity in his preparations for the autopsy. He first ordered a large kitchen table to be brought into the middle of the room, and had Delapine's body placed on it. Doctor Villebois offered his assistance, which was somewhat reluctantly accepted.

Selecting a sharp scalpel Dr. Roux was about to make

the first incision, when Riche rushed into the room in a state of tremendous excitement.

"Stop! For God's sake stop," he shouted, "before it is too late," and seizing Dr. Roux' arm he pulled it away so violently that the scalpel cut one of the worthy doctor's fingers.

"What is the matter with you, are you mad?" exclaimed Dr. Roux, as he tried to stop the blood which spurted from his finger.

"Stop, stop, you must not touch him, it's murder," cried Riche. "See here," and he showed Roux a letter which he had just taken out of the envelope.

Roux seized the letter and proceeded to read it, while the two other doctors read it from over his shoulder:—

"My beloved Renee," it ran—

"I have reason to suspect that someone is intending to poison me with a drug of such fearful power that I shall either be killed instantly or, what is more probable, I shall be rendered apparently dead, and show no signs of life. If therefore I am found apparently dead, I enjoin you for the love you bear me, not to permit my autopsy, or burial, until the signs of death are clear and unmistakable, otherwise I may be killed or buried alive."

"There, Dr. Roux, what do you make of that?" asked Riche.

"It is a hoax, sir," said Roux, "the man is dead right enough. I shall proceed to do my duty."

"You will not, sir," said Riche in a rage.

"Who are you, sir, that you speak to me in this way, and forbid me to obey my orders?"

"I am Dr. Riche, Ancien Interne at the Hotel Dieu, and surgeon to the Charité at Algiers," he said, handing over his card.

Dr. Roux looked him up and down from head to foot, and adjusting his pince-nez with deliberation took the card and read it carefully. Again he paused and looked at Riche, but observing the terrible earnestness of his expression, he restrained his feelings. "Dr. Riche," he exclaimed with mingled hesitation and astonishment, "forgive me, I apologise for my rudeness, I had no idea

I was addressing a colleague so celebrated," and he offered his hand which Riche shook heartily.

"I also agree with my friend and colleague," said Villebois. "We must desist at once and arrange to await events."

Roux gave a slight grunt of disappointment, but yielding to the inevitable, packed up his instruments, and putting on his coat, bowed profoundly, and prepared to depart.

"No, Dr. Roux, we cannot allow you to go without partaking of our hospitality," said Villebois, bowing. "Let us go to the library, and break a bottle of wine between us."

The three doctors were soon chatting round the table in the library the very best of friends.

"See, doctor, what I have just found in another envelope," said Riche, handing Roux a little love-poem which Delapine had evidently written to Renée about the same time as the letter.

"Let me read it to you," said Riche, "it's a gentle rhyme of four verses such as a lover might write to his lady-love. It has, however, a disguised prophetic meaning which shows clearly that Delapine felt convinced that his 'death' would only be apparent, and that he would eventually return to life.

"Listen, this is what he says:

"Is it raining little sister?
Be glad of rain.
Yield not to the doubt sinister,
Choose the pain.
It will make your burden lighter,
It will make your joy the brighter,
Renée dear.

"Does your heart ache, Renée dear?
Be glad of pain.
The harvest never will draw near,
Without rain.
Sorrow must prepare the way
For the clouds to pass away,
Renée dear.

"Instead of weeping at your loss,
Rejoice for him.
You cannot see that he is sleeping,

With eyes so dim.
Death can never reach so far,
Peering through the gates ajar,
Renée dear.

"Are you weary of the fight?
Struggle on.
When all is lost, and dark the night,
The victory's won.
Love will steer your bark aright,
When there is no land in sight,
Renée dear."

"It would be interesting to see if we could find any indications of life," said Roux, "and I propose that we adjourn to Delapine's bedside once more."

"That is quite a good idea," said Villebois and Riche together.

"If you will permit me, gentlemen," said Roux after applying the stethoscope over the heart to no purpose, "I will make a prick with a needle into the arm." He did so, but no blood flowed. "That is a certain proof that he is dead."

"Not so fast, not so fast, sir," said Riche. "Bring me a mirror. This is a much more delicate test which I have made with great success in Algiers, when all other methods have failed." The doctor held a small mirror close to Delapine's mouth, and the three doctors gazed at the highly polished surface intensely.

"Look, Villebois, look," said Riche excitedly. "I swear I saw a trace of vapour on the surface."

Villebois repeated the experiment without result.

"I think the mirror is too warm," said Villebois, "let us cool it." He placed the back of the mirror on a lump of ice for a minute, and wiping the surface with a handkerchief, tried again. "See, see, there is a trace of moisture—I swear it, look!"

All three doctors repeated the experiment several times. Sometimes they failed and sometimes they succeeded, or thought they succeeded, and Roux finally departed, unconvinced that he was alive, but at the same time unwilling to sign a certificate to the effect that he was dead. "We must wait for the postmortem signs to appear over the

abdomen," he said to himself. "Three days will settle it at any rate."

Riche and Villebois, however, were more sanguine, and they went back to Renée's room.

They found Payot sitting by her side, applying the iced bandages to her head, and ever and anon stroking her hair and kissing her forehead.

Renée recognised her father, and smiled with mingled surprise and pleasure at the great change which had come over his conduct towards her.

"Cheer up, Renée," Villebois cried aloud as they ran to her bedside, "cheer up, we have not abandoned all hope yet."

Renée was so petrified with astonishment that she was unable to speak for some moments.

"What did you say? Do you mean that Henri is alive?"

"Well, not exactly that," interposed Riche, "but I could almost swear he is not dead."

Renée sat bolt upright in bed, and rubbed her eyes to make sure she was not dreaming, and seizing Riche's hand made him repeat his statement.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, doctor, for this good news."

"Read this, Renée, and this as well," he said smiling, and he handed her Delapine's message and tender little verses.

"Are these what you found in the envelope?" she exclaimed, when she had read the contents. "Now I am certain that he will return to me."

"Oh, father," she cried, putting her arms round him and kissing him, "this is the best medicine in the world for me, it will soon make me well. See, I feel better already," and she clapped her hands for joy.

"Quick, doctor, run and fetch Céleste that I may be the first to give her the good news."

Presently Céleste came in, and Renée told her what she had just heard.

"Oh, Renée, this is almost too good to be true. Won't it be just delightful to have him back again. I don't think we half know the value of anything until we are deprived of it."

"You are perfectly correct," said Riche, "really I think the philosophic mantle of the profossor must have descended on you."

"Now I begin to understand what Professor Delapine meant when he said the other day 'We shall be separated for a long time, but take courage, it will all come right.' It was a riddle to me at the time, but now it is quite clear what he meant. Don't you think, papa, that the professor must have some wonderful power of seeing into the future? How else could he possibly guess what was going to happen to him?"

"I can understand in a sort of vague way," said Payot, "that very clever people might be able to discover what had happened in the past, but how anyone can tell what is going to happen in the future is a mystery to me. Can you explain it to me, doctor?"

"I confess the whole thing is inconceivable to me," said Villebois, "and yet I know that it is not impossible, because on more than one occasion Delapine has predicted the most minute details of facts and events which have occurred since precisely as he said they would happen, and I have never once known him wrong."

"When Henri comes back to me I will ask him," said Renée as she looked up at Villebois with a slight nod, convinced in her own mind that Delapine was only taking a longer sleep than usual, and that he would be able to wake up of his own accord like Rip van Winkle. "I am sure he will be able to explain it, because he knows everything."

"That is rather a large order, mademoiselle," said Riche, laughing. "Even the immortal gods of Homer were not omniscient. If you had read your Faust you may recollect that when Mephistopheles is asked if he knows everything, replies 'Allwissend bin ich nicht; doch viel ist mir bewust.'" *

"But you must admit that the professor is frightfully clever," said Céleste, looking up at Renée for confirmation.

"There I am entirely with you," said Riche. "He is certainly the most gifted man I ever met. His marvellous discoveries are not all of a character that meet the public eye, as they are too mathematical and too far above the grasp of the general public to be appreciated; but you

* Omniscient am I not, yet much is known to me.
FAUST, part I, act 4.

have only to ask any member of the Institute or of any of the royal societies of Europe what they think of him, and they will tell you he has a remarkable future before him. There is really nothing that seems impossible to him, if he only gives his mind to it. Isn't that your opinion, Mademoiselle Renée?"

But Renée never answered. The fresh excitement on hearing the good news had revived her for the moment, and then the reaction set in, and she fell back exhausted, and dropped asleep.

Villebois pointed to Renée, and held his fingers to his lips, then beckoning to the others to follow him, he slipped out of the room on tiptoe. Riche quickly pulled down the blinds, and made the room dark, while Renée was left alone to her slumbers.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Que l'oumbro, e toujour l'oumbro, es pire que la mort ! *
MISTAL (*Mireille Chant xii.*)

'Fleet footed is the approach of woe
But with a lingering step and slow
Its form departs.'—LONGFELLOW, *Coplas de Manrique.*

DR. ROUX was a man who had risen to his present position by strict attention to his profession. He was an able man, and thoroughly versed in all the mysteries of his art. His reports to the Juge d' Instruction were always models of accuracy and precision, and were accepted without question by the Parquet. But now he confessed he was in a dilemma. "Here is a nice state of things," he soliloquised, "I come to Dr. Villebois' house for the purpose of making a post-mortem examination, and after getting everything ready to begin, two doctors whom I have never seen before persuade me to abandon my task. Now if I say he is dead I shall be blamed for not performing the autopsy; but if, on the other hand, I state that he is not dead, they will naturally ask me what proofs I have, and I must confess I have none. I had better talk it over with Paul Romaine. I fancy he will be at leisure during the afternoon.

"Well, it is too late now, he will have gone home."

The next day at four o'clock Roux knocked at the door of the Government laboratory.

At the moment of Roux's arrival, Paul was busily engaged in tidying up the laboratory previous to his going home.

"Well, what brings you here?" called out Paul as his visitor was ushered in. "I haven't seen you since we were

* For the shadow—yea verily the shadow (of death) is worse than Death itself.

students together at the Salpetrière under old Charcot. It is the unexpected that always happens."

"That is quite comprehensible," replied Roux, "the expected only comprises one event, whereas the unexpected may be any one of a million things. Hence the chances of the unexpected are a million to one compared with the expected."

"That is a queer kind of logic," replied Paul, laughing, "I wonder in what school of philosophy you were taught."

"The philosophy of the unknown—it is the best of all philosophies because no one can dispute it. But to be serious, my dear colleague, I want your advice as I am rather in a difficulty. Yesterday I received an order to conduct a post-mortem examination on the body of Professor Delapine who happened to have been the guest of Dr. Villebois in Passy."

"Whom did you say?" asked Paul becoming interested.

"Professor Delapine."

"What! Professor Delapine of the Sorbonne. I had no idea that he was dead. What did he die of?"

"I don't know that he is dead. That is just my difficulty."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were ordered by the Parquet to make a post-mortem examination, and you don't know whether he is dead or not? My dear fellow, if I did not know you for a serious man I would think that you were joking."

"I don't wonder at what you say, but pray listen to me patiently for a moment. It seems that the professor is a medium or spiritualist, or whatever you choose to call it, and the day before yesterday he was lying down in a sleep or trance in a sort of flimsy cabinet, when a cry of fire was raised, and the audience rushed out of the room upstairs to see where the fire had started. While they were gone a medical man—Dr. Riche, I think the name was—remembering that the professor was in a deep sleep or trance, ran down to look after him with a view of transferring him to a place of safety. As he was in the act of opening the door of the room where the professor was lying, it was shut with a bang by someone inside who immediately locked the door, and evidently got away, for when the door

was forced, the intruder was nowhere to be seen. But the remarkable thing about it was that a medical hypodermic syringe was found lying on the floor half full of liquid, and on examining Delapine's body a puncture was discovered in his arm which was evidently made by the needle of the syringe. It appears that the head of the police was sent for, and he found Delapine lying on the couch apparently dead. Yesterday afternoon I arrived at the house in answer to a summons, and was about to conduct the autopsy—in fact I had the scalpel in my hand—when this Doctor Riche rushed into the room in a tremendous state of excitement, and tore the knife out of my hand so violently that it cut my fingers. 'Stop, in Heaven's name, stop,' he cried, 'do you want to commit murder?' I naturally became very indignant, and requested him to leave me to my work. Villebois backed up Dr. Riche, and suggested our talking things over in the smoking-room."

"That reminds me," said Paul, "won't you take something? I have some first-rate Beaune locked up in the cupboard which I only bring out to my special friends."

"Well, thanks, I don't mind. But let me offer you one of my cigarettes," said Roux. "Mine are a very special brand which I get from Prazmouski in Moscow. They send me about twelve boxes every month, and they are so delicious I always run short before the month is out."

"For my part," said Paul, "I am so accustomed to smoking Caporals that I have lost the taste for any other brand. Still, if I may—thanks. Yes, these certainly smell delicious," he added as he tapped the end of one on the table.

The two men sat quietly musing in their armchairs as they drank their wine and puffed away in silence.

Paul inhaled his smoke, ejecting it in two white whirls through his nostrils as he reflected on what his friend had been telling him.

"I wonder," he said, as a sudden thought occurred to him, "what made the two doctors stop you in such a hurry? Did they think he was not dead?"

"That is the extraordinary part of the tale. Riche happened to open a drawer at the request of one of the young ladies in the house, and found an envelope sealed

up and addressed by Delapine to her. On opening it he found a curious message to the effect that if he were found dead, his body was not to be buried or opened by anyone as he was suspicious of foul play, and it was quite possible that he might not be really dead."

"When did he find this envelope?"

"While I was getting my instruments ready for examination."

Paul blew a cloud of smoke out of his nose and whistled. "'Pon my soul, this is a most mysterious affair. I have known many mysterious things in my life, but I have never come across anything so strange as this. And of course you felt it your duty to suspend operations?"

"Naturally I decided to await events."

"But tell me, doctor, what proofs have they that he is not dead?"

"Well, there have been no signs of post-mortem rigidity. If there had been any we must have noticed it, as one or the other of us has been at his side the whole time."

"How long has he been in that state?"

"Over forty-eight hours, and what is equally curious the body shows no signs of discoloration."

"Not even in the dependent parts?"

"Nowhere; not a sign. We have turned him over several times and his skin is quite white and clean."

Paul began to hum a tune. "Well, that is certainly most extraordinary. If he had been really dead both these signs must have appeared before now."

"That is true enough, but I confess I am rather in a difficulty what to do. The Parquet expects a detailed report of my medical investigation which must be handed in at once, as the law of France demands the burial of the deceased within three days."

"Certainement," said Paul. "But I should like to advise you that you and Monsieur le Commissaire Biron should deliver a verbal report ad interim to the Parquet in which you two describe the extraordinary state of affairs, and ask the Parquet the permission for Delapine's body to remain in its present position until his demise is ascertained without a shadow of doubt. Dr. Villebois, as owner of the house in which the strange occurrence

happened, is bound to report it to the authorities on his behalf. If he will make an application to the Parquet in the same sense as I wish you and Monsieur Biron to do I am sure he will be allowed to keep Delapine's body in the house until all is settled."

"Vous avez raison," answered Roux, "I shall go and see Monsieur Biron to-morrow. There is something strange in Delapine's appearance which makes me believe that he is still alive, although there is absolutely no pulse, no heart sounds, and his temperature is very little, if any, above that of the room. In fact there are no signs of life whatever."

Roux looked anxiously at his friend Paul who had been listening intently to every word he said.

A sudden thought struck Paul. "Tell me," he said, "what was the fluid which the fellow injected into the professor's arm?"

"That I cannot tell you. I know it was a slightly yellowish-looking liquid, very brilliant, and possessing a pale bluish opalescense like quinine. Dr. Riche showed me what had been left in the syringe which he had poured into a small phial."

Paul played with his fingers nervously and poured out another glass of wine.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, "while I go into my laboratory."

"Mayn't I come with you?" asked Roux.

"Certainly, certainly, my dear colleague, by all means."

The two entered the laboratory, and Paul took up a well-worn handbook on Medical Jurisprudence, and with feverish haste turned up one reference after another.

"No," he said to himself, "there is nothing here which can afford a clue. I know of no poison which can produce the symptoms of death-trance. Stay, wait a minute," and he tapped his forehead. "Yes, how stupid of me," he said aloud, and crossing over to the side of the room he fetched a short ladder and ran rapidly up the steps. "Mon Dieu!" he cried, as he took down the bottle which had been sent him from Japan. "Look here, Roux, do you see this little bottle?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Observe it is half empty, and I swear the other day it was quite full. Who could have taken it? I am always so particular to keep the room locked. Good God," he suddenly exclaimed, "can it be possible?"

"What is the matter?" asked Roux, as his companion suddenly stopped and put his hand to his head. "Are you ill?"

Taking the bottle in his hands he descended the ladder all of a tremble. In his excitement he lost his balance, and fell to the ground with the steps on top of him. The bottle flew out of his hand and was smashed to atoms.

"Oh dear, oh dear," he cried, "all the liquid has escaped. What shall I do?" and he wrung his hands in despair.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Roux, running up to the assistance of his friend. "Are you hurt?"

"No, no," said Paul testily, "don't mind me—it's the bottle," he cried. "It is a priceless treasure. It contained a poison from Japan, and some of the contents have been stolen."

"Well, surely that is not of much consequence," said Roux.

"Not of much consequence, you idiot? Don't you see that this contained the liquid which the fellow injected into Delapine's arm? I understand it all now," said Paul.

"Tell me quickly, have you found out who could have stolen the liquid? What was the rascal like, do you know his name?" asked Roux. "I am sorry I forgot to ask Dr. Riche about him."

"Still, if he knows he will tell us," answered Paul, anxious to conceal his thoughts, but with such a look of hesitancy and in such a strange voice that Roux felt certain that Paul knew a great deal more than he cared to admit.

"I believe you know who did it, but don't want to tell me. Confess now, Paul."

Paul's mind became a whirl of conflicting emotions. If he told Roux, the latter would have to put it in his report and communicate with the Parquet. And then there would be the greatest trouble. He stammered and hesitated while his face turned perfectly scarlet.

"Come now, out with it," said Roux impatiently.

"I cannot, I cannot," replied Paul, "please do not press me, but Dr. Villebois will tell you better than I can."

"Is Villebois on the telephone?"

"Yes, of course."

Roux ran over to the telephone and called up 26-230

"Hullo, is that you, Dr. Villebois?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"Dr. Roux is speaking. I want to know if you have any clue as to the man who injected the fluid into Professor Delapine's arm?"

"No," came the reply, "we have no actual proof as to who did it, but we believe that the would-be assassin was the same individual who set fire to Riche's room."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because by setting fire to Riche's room it would draw the people in the house upstairs, so that the fellow could not be interrupted in his ghastly work."

"I think that is quite a reasonable explanation, but what a pity the scoundrel escaped," said Roux.

"Never mind, we shall find him yet," replied Villebois.

"May we come and see you at once?" asked Roux. "It is most important."

"Certainly, I will wait in for you; au revoir," and the telephone ceased.

Roux at once informed Paul what Dr. Villebois had told him.

"My God, what a scoundrel," said Paul. "But the motive—the motive?"

"I am quite in the dark as to his motive, anyhow there can be no doubt as to the course we have to pursue," said Roux. "Let us go together to Villebois's house, and we will examine the professor and draw up a report together."

"I have changed my mind, Dr. Roux, I shall tell you everything when we see Villebois. This last piece of villainy has decided me. The criminal must be brought to justice. But what a misfortune that I have lost all that precious fluid."

"Well, never mind, old chap, Dr. Riche has quite enough left for us to test."

"Do you really mean it? Thank God for that. Let us

go at once, there is no time to lose . . . as the proverb has it 'Il faut battre le fer quand il est chaud.'"[1]

A few minutes later the two doctors might have been seen walking rapidly in the direction of Villebois's house.

Half an hour later Roux and Paul were ushered into the library, where Villebois and Riche were awaiting their arrival.

Villebois looked at least ten years older than he did a week ago. He was no longer the faultlessly attired active physician of yore, his dress was untidy and his face bore traces of sleepless nights and constant mental strain.

"Ah, mon cher docteur," said Roux, "I am sorry to see you looking so depressed."

"Thank you, I confess I don't feel myself at all. I am so worried over this affair. The more I think of it, the more terrible it becomes, until it swells up into a Frankenstein. To have a fire in one's house is bad enough, but to have a murdered friend lying in one's drawing-room day after day is too awful to contemplate. The cook spends all her time gossiping with the butcher and the baker, and every person who comes to the back door. I found the butler lying dead drunk in the pantry for the first time since he has been in my service. Céleste and Renée are worn out with watching the professor, and now I am worried to death with official visits from the Maire and the police. My house is watched by detectives, and all the neighbours hang about outside the garden peering in at the windows, and pointing at me with their fingers, and whispering to each other. I shall go mad if this affair goes on much longer. We must find some way out of it."

"That's the very reason we have come, mon ami," said Roux; "but first let me ask you what the Commissaire de Police has done?"

"Nothing as far as I know. He has telephoned up three times to know the reason why you have not sent in your report, and has placed two detectives here to watch the grounds."

"Has he ordered any arrest to be made?"

[1] One must strike the iron while it is hot.

"How could he, when we could not inform him who the culprit was? We could not charge Pierre with the crime."

"Why not?" asked Roux.

"Why not? My dear doctor, seeing that both he and his father have been guests at our house what could we do? We were unable to prove that Pierre was concerned in it, and supposing he turned out to be innocent? What would the Duvals think of us? The father would probably challenge me to fight him, and in any case we should have made them our enemies for life. Put yourself for a moment in Pierre's position. Suppose someone accused you of first setting fire to his house when you were his guest at the time, and then of poisoning a fellow guest who had never done you any harm, by means of some fearful drug, and it turned out afterwards that you were quite innocent, what would you think of him? That is absolutely the case with Pierre."

"Not so fast, doctor," said Paul, "I can prove that he is the person who did it. For God's sake do not pose as a miserable sentimentalist."

"What!" they all exclaimed with looks of horror on their faces, "do you really mean that Pierre did the dastardly act?"

"Certainly. Do you remember, Dr. Roux, when you called on me this afternoon and asked me to help you to draw up your report as you were uncertain whether Delapine was dead or not?"

"I do, perfectly."

"Well, you recollect that I searched in my text-books to find some drug which would cause a person to lapse into a state of apparent death for a long period, and failing to discover it, I suddenly thought of something, and climbed up a ladder and took a bottle from the top shelf, and to my horror and amazement discovered it to be half empty?"

"I do, and what's more you seemed to have lost your senses for a moment, you were so agitated," said Roux.

"Now, I suddenly remembered that two or three weeks ago, Pierre, whom I have not seen for two or more years, unexpectedly called and cross-questioned me as to the action of certain secret poisons which science has been

unable to detect, and I showed him a Japanese poison which had recently arrived from Tokio. I took the bottle down and showed it to him, and I then replaced it on the shelf. The liquid was a thick, highly refractive dichromic liquid, which had a very unusual appearance something like quinine only much more highly refractive, besides being far heavier. When we left the room we waited in the passage of the house for a cab, when suddenly Pierre asked for the loan of the key of the room as he had forgotten his cigarette case. Not suspecting anything, I gave it to him, and waited there until he returned. To the best of my recollection, no one except my servant has ever had access to the room since, and when I discovered the bottle half empty to-day I knew it must have been Pierre who had opened it."

"Yes," said Riche, "and I remember at the séance last week I noticed Pierre quietly slip out of the room and disappear. Well, less than half an hour afterwards we all noticed the smoke of the fire."

"A strange coincidence that the two events should follow one another so soon," said Villebois, who had been listening intently. "Not only that, but your daughter called my attention to the fact that Pierre tampered with Delapine's coffee when we had the race on the lawn, and I think we all noticed how cleverly Delapine excused himself from drinking it, and killed a plant with a few drops of the liquid. You see how all these facts fit in together and render the evidence of his guilt convincing. Lastly, here is the liquid which I emptied out of the syringe I found on the floor of the séance-room after the person inside had escaped."

Paul took the bottle out of Riche's hand and examined it carefully.

"Yes," he replied, as he placed it on the table for the others to look at. "That is the Japanese liquid which was stolen from my laboratory."

"Are you quite sure?" asked Roux.

"Certainly, I can swear to it as it has a peculiar appearance which no other liquid possesess. Examine it for yourselves, gentlemen," and he handed the bottle to the others to inspect. The four doctors looked at one another

for some time in silence. Villebois and Riche exchanged glances of surprise and horror.

"Mais, messieurs, this is terrible. What are we to do?" said Villebois, breaking the spell. Another silence followed, as if each one was afraid to say what he thought. At length Roux got up and said,

"I must do my duty, my dear colleague, and place this evidence in my report."

"For my part I should like to keep his name out of it," said Villebois.

"What! Would you screen an incarnate fiend from justice?" cried Paul and Roux together. "No, my dear Villebois," added Roux, leaning forward with both hands on the table, "there are crimes which we cannot allow our feelings to hide. We may be able to forgive injuries done to ourselves, but to protect a scoundrel who abuses your hospitality by murdering your friend and guest in cold blood, exceeds all the bounds of mercy."

"Well," said Villebois with a sigh, "I withhold my objection provided you will promise me the police will not be informed before twenty-four hours have elapsed. It is now six p.m. Promise me, Dr. Roux, that your report will not be handed in before the same time to-morrow."

"I suppose you wish to have time to warn Pierre?"

"Precisely," replied Villebois, "pray respect my feelings, gentlemen, I do it more to spare my friends Payot and General Duval."

Roux shook his head and frowned. "I cannot permit my feelings to interfere with my duty," he answered.

Paul nodded his head with approval.

"That is quite right," said Villebois, "but surely you will show me, your confrère, some mercy as well. If Pierre has time to escape no one will suffer, and we shall be effectually rid of him."

"Jamais de la vie," said Roux, his eyes flashing with indignation, and banging his fist on the table with such force that the contents of the inkpot were spilled. "I regret, my dear doctor," he added in a calmer voice, "I cannot oblige you, for I am determined that this unmitigated scoundrel shall be brought to justice, and I shall

prepare my report at once and hand it without delay to the Commissaire de Police."

"And I mean to back you up, Roux," said Paul. "I swear I will not rest until this fiend is run to earth."

Paul shook hands with Villebois and Riche, and taking Roux by the arm, the two left the house without another word.

"Riche," said Villebois the moment they were alone, "this is a terrible business. I'm afraid it's all up with Pierre."

"Well, for my part, I hate the brute, and the sooner he gets his deserts the better. I should be only too happy to act the part of 'Monsieur de Paris' myself, and would not shed a tear when I saw his head fall into the basket."

Villebois heaved a sigh, and wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "Perhaps they are right after all," he said to himself, "but then there is the old General to consider. It will kill him surely enough if his son is arrested on a charge of deliberate murder."

"Riche," he called out as a sudden idea struck him, "my nerves are so unstrung I feel I need a drop of cognac; will you share a liqueur with me?" and without waiting for a reply he rang the bell. "François," he said as the butler appeared, "bring a bottle of old liqueur brandy. No, you don't know where that special brand is, I will go." So saying, he followed François, closing the door behind him.

"François," he added in a hoarse whisper, "not a word, not a word of what I do, do you hear me?"

The butler nodded and touched his forehead.

"Now go and fetch the brandy. Stop, wait a minute."

Villebois took an old 'petit bleu' from his pocket, gummed it down and handed it to François.

"Hand me this when you bring the cognac, and tell me it has just arrived."

François saluted and vanished, while Villebois returned to the library.

Presently François arrived with a tray of glasses and the liqueur, and handed him the telegram.

"Why did you not bring me this before?" asked Villebois.

"It has only just arrived, sir," replied François, like a school-boy repeating a lesson.

Villebois hastily opened it, and glancing at the contents put it into his pocket.

"Excuse me, Riche," he said, swallowing a petit verre of the liqueur, "but I have an important appointment to keep. Pray amuse yourself until I return. You will find the last number of *La Vie Parisienne* on my table."

Villebois left the room and hurried to the telephone.

"Is Monsieur Pierre at home?"

"No, sir," came the reply, "he has gone to his club in the Avenue de l'Opera. He left half an hour ago."

"H'm," said Villebois, "this is very awkward."

"Oh, by the way, Marcel," he added as that little gentleman appeared in the passage, "just put on your hat and take a walk with me."

The two gentlemen hurried out of the house, and walked slowly arm in arm up and down the garden.

"Marcel, I want to take you into my confidence. Will you do me a special favour?" said Villebois, suddenly pausing in his walk and facing his companion.

"Certainly," replied Marcel, who loved nothing better than an adventure. "Command me and I will obey."

"Well then, I want you to go to the Circle des Italiens in the Avenue de l'Opera and ask to see Pierre. Tell him everything is discovered, and the game is up. He must leave Paris to-night, and disappear from France as quickly as possible. It is absolutely necessary for him to leave at once, as an order for his arrest may be issued at any moment. If his father learns of it, it will certainly kill him, and the disgrace and worry will probably finish me as well."

Villebois slowly walked back to his house, while Marcel ran out into the street and hailing a cab drove off towards the city.

CHAPTER XVII

EMILE VISITS HIS FRIEND PIERRE WITH MOST UNPLEASANT CONSEQUENCES

"Tout mal arrive avec des ailes."

VOLTAIRE.

"Ben provide i'l cielo,
Ch' uom per delitti mai lieto non sia." *

It was late at night when Pierre left the café and started out for his chambers in blissful ignorance that he was being closely followed by a man. The night was clear, and the innumerable shops and cafés lit up, gave the boulevard that bright and animated appearance which is one of the peculiar charms of the gay city.

He pulled out his cigarette case, a silver-gilt one with his monogram in blue enamel, a new-year's gift from Payot, and discovered it empty. Pierre got out of his fiacre, and dismissing the cocher turned into one of the numerous tobacco shops, where he speedily refilled it, and was in the act of lifting it up when the man, no other than Emile Levasseur, the waiter and lover of the girl whom he had insulted at Maxim's, dexterously extracted a pocket-book from Pierre's breast pocket. Long practice had made him an expert at this game, and watching his opportunity until Pierre had turned down one of the side streets, where he could be more easily followed, he opened it under one of the street lamps, and hastily looked through its contents. After abstracting a billet de banque for five hundred francs which he transferred to his own pocket to meet any

* "Heaven provides that man shall ne'er by crime to happiness attain."

emergencies that might arise, together with a few visiting cards which were evidently Pierre's—seeing that they all bore the same address—he left the rest of the notes in the pocket-book, and continued to follow Pierre. At length he observed Pierre take out his latch key, and running after him with the pocket-book in his hand took off his hat with a polite bow.

"A thousand pardons, but has not monsieur forgotten his pocket-book a few moments ago?"

Pierre felt in his coat pocket, and not finding it there, turned round to look at Emile once more.

"I had the honour to notice it lying on the counter of the tobacco shop after monsieur had just left it. But monsieur travelled so fast I had some difficulty in reaching him."

Pierre took the pocket-book, and after seeing that the contents had apparently not been tampered with, thanked him and offered him a five franc piece.

Emile refused the proffered tip with a superb smile, and a majestic wave of the hand.

"A thousand pardons, but really I cannot accept anything from monsieur, the fact that I have been the humble means of restoring monsieur's property is more than ample reward for me."

Pierre grunted with a smile of contemptuous unbelief, and returned the piece to his pocket, after scanning him closely from head to foot. His inspection was evidently satisfactory for he paused for a few minutes and asked him whether he would care to perform a small service for him, for which he would pay him handsomely.

"Ah, monsieur is too generous. To serve a patron like monsieur would be the supreme desire of my life, and payment would be quite a secondary consideration," he said with a greasy supercilious smile.

"What is your name and address?" asked Pierre.

Monsieur Emile opened a small card-case and handed him one of his cards which he always kept in readiness for emergencies like these. It bore the inscription:—

Emile Deschamps,
Traveller and Confidential Agent.

Rue du Rhone,
Grenoble.

The inscription on the card had been devised by M. Emile after much meditation and reflection, and while drawn up to create confidence in the recipient, was really as misleading a document as one could find.

"You see," he would say to his 'copains,' "Grenoble is too far away for anyone in Paris to make awkward enquiries, the name of the street carries no number, and the fact that I am a traveller explains my presence in any city where I may be at the time, and does away with the necessity of having a fixed address. Moreover a confidential agent imparts a certain tone and air of respectability which cannot fail to give me the entire confidence of any patron who may be the favoured recipient of this small piece of pasteboard. Besides this, the fact that I have been a garçon for several years has enabled me to acquire that polished debonair appearance and deportment which can only be acquired from constant attendance on the high-born gentlemen and ladies whom I have had the honour to serve."

Glancing at the card, Pierre invited him to enter his rooms, and in a few moments the pair were settled in a well-furnished and comfortable library.

Emile was decidedly well dressed for a waiter, and beyond the fact that he wore mutton chop whiskers, a cleanly shaven face, a bald head, and had the habit of inadvertently placing his napkin under his arm and

stepping across the room with his head in the air, no one would have suspected that he was in that line of business. He was a coward at heart, and was one of those sneaks who are always hanging about street corners—in fact he made street corners a speciality—and he was ever on the watch for something to turn up which might add to his income. These blackmailers—for that is what they really are—abound in all large cities, and seem without exception to attach themselves to one or more of the fair sex, whose inherited instincts of virtue have long since evaporated, and who night after night frequent one or other of the music halls or cafés, for the purpose of making fresh conquests. These pimps exert an evil influence over the minds of the girls, and by slow degrees insidiously drag them down to their own infamous level. Always keeping in the background, they are never seen by the gentleman who is drawn into the fair charmer's net, and only appear on the scenes when they perceive an opportunity of extracting money as the price of silence.

"Now, sir," said Pierre, as he poured out a small glass of absinthe which M. Emile tossed off at a gulp, "I want you to act as my private detective and watch a certain house for me, and to inform me of everything that goes on there. You are to call here at least once every day, and if I am out you are to leave a written message in a sealed envelope. I will pay you well, provided you allow no one to become acquainted with your movements, and you are not to tell a single soul as to where I am, or what I am doing. Is that well understood?"

"Oh, monsieur, if you only knew me better, you would be convinced that you have selected the best private detective in all Paris. I have frequently undertaken little commissions of this sort when travelling for my firm."

"Good! That will do. Now what do you consider a fair return for doing me this service?"

"Ah! I see monsieur is generous—I leave it to him."

"Well," said Pierre, lighting a fresh cigarette, and blowing a few whiffs in silence, "let me see. Supposing I pay you ten francs a day. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, mon cher monsieur!—"

"Don't address me as 'mon cher,'" Pierre interrupted. "Please remember you are my servant, and not my equal."

"Pardon, monsieur, a thousand apologies, it was my great appreciation of your nobility of character that warmed my heart towards you and impelled me to say this."

"Look here, Monsieur Émile, if you think you are going to get round me by that sort of blarney you're jolly mistaken. Tell me what you are prepared to accept, and don't try on any more of your monkey-brand soap on me, it won't wash. You'll provoke me to say something in a moment that you won't like. Now out with it. How much?"

"Ah! Monsieur is too cruel. The last time I undertook a commission like this I reluctantly accepted a hundred francs a day, but as I have taken a great fancy to you I will make an immense sacrifice and accept fifty francs."

"I suppose you think I'm a soft-headed idiot, and that I believe all your silly tales. Well, I may as well be frank and tell you that I don't believe a word you say. Look here, I'll offer you fifteen francs a day, and not a sou more. You may take it or leave it as you please."

Emile Levasseur cowed under the stern voice of Pierre, and seeing that the game was up, shrugged his shoulders, and spreading out the palms of his hands in a supplicatory fashion with a look of intense resignation and reluctance, accepted the offer.

Pierre gave a smile of satisfaction at the success of his counter-stroke, and after giving his now engaged detective a few more instructions, rang the bell, and ordered his valet to show him out. Emile was no match for a determined man, but having extremely plausible ways, he generally succeeded in gaining his ends with the lower class of women, and especially servant girls. Hence his first manœuvre to establish a footing in Villebois's house was by pandering to the vanity of the doctor's female servants. By means of a little subtle flattery, a kiss or two, and a few francs carefully invested in scents and cheap ribbons, he soon won the favour of the housemaid. From her he learnt all the goings-on in the house—the death-like trance of Delapine, the interrupted autopsy on the body, the

discovery of the hypodermic syringe and the needle, and the visits of Messieurs Biron and Roux.

A couple of days later as Emile was loafing round the house during the evening, he noticed Villebois and Marcel engaged in earnest conversation in the garden. Thinking it might prove useful, he managed to climb over the wall and creep up to them in the dusk. He found an excellent hiding place quite close to them behind one of the laurel bushes. Emile could not catch all they said, but he distinctly heard Villebois say to Marcel, "Go to Pierre's club 'the circle des Italiens' in the Avenue de l'Opera, and inform him from me that he must quit France to-night, or he will be arrested to-morrow for the murder of Delapine. All is discovered and the game is up, and if his father hears of his arrest it will certainly kill him."

As they moved down the path Emile lost the rest of the conversation. He remained concealed until Villebois and Marcel had entered the house, and then creeping along the garden wall he succeeded in passing unobserved into the street.

Presently he saw Marcel come out of the house and hurry past. Emile watched him drive off in a fiacre, and hurried after him on foot, seeking all the time in vain for some means of overtaking him. Five minutes or more elapsed, but no vehicle could be seen. At length Emile threw up his hands in despair, and was on the point of abandoning the task as hopeless, when he saw a private motor-car coming along with two men inside. As he rushed into the middle of the road and waved his hands in front of the advancing car, the chauffeur brought the powerful Mercèdes to a stand, and demanded an explanation of the stoppage.

"A thousand pardons, gentlemen," said Emile, assuming a most bewitching smile of the very latest pattern, "but my car has broken down, and it is imperative that I should reach my club in the Avenue de l'Opera immediately. If I might trespass on your kindness, and ask you to drive me?"

The two men looked at each other and hesitated, but Emile handed them his visiting card with an elegant flourish, and a courtly bow. The card handed to the

occupants of the Mercèdes bore a crown in the centre, and in ornamental copperplate letters appeared underneath :—

Le Comte de Saint-Beuve.

Château de Foret,
Fontainbleau.

This at once decided the case, and delighted that they had a gentleman of such good rank and courtly bearing for a companion, they had no hesitation in granting his request, and cordially inviting him to be seated, they drove away to the club.

As the car pulled up at the entrance, one of the pages opened the door, and Emile, shaking hands with his two friends, majestically stepped out. Mounting the steps in a dignified manner, he passed by the portier as if the place belonged to him, without even deigning to look round.

Entering one of the writing rooms, he hastily scribbled a note, and descending at once he stood at the entrance of the club awaiting the arrival of Marcel.

A few minutes afterwards his quarry appeared, and Emile, walking up to him, hat in hand: "Excuse me sir, are you Monsieur Marcel?"

"Yes, that is my name. Why do you address me?"

"Because Monsieur Pierre Duval gave me this note for you."

Marcel looked very surprised at receiving a letter from Pierre as he could not imagine how Pierre could divine that he would call, but he at once took the proffered letter, and tearing open the envelope read as follows:—

"DEAR MARCEL,

I much regret to have missed you, but I have just received an urgent telegram calling me away to defend a case at Orleans which will probably detain me for a few days. A letter addressed to the Hotel de la Pucelle will find me. So sorry to have missed you.

A bientôt,

PIERRE."

While Marcel was reading the note Emile passed out of the club, and was speedily lost to sight.

"This is awkward," muttered Marcel, "still it will give him time to escape if Villebois writes him to-night. Well, it can't be helped, I must see Villebois, and he can write or send a wire to warn him. Anyhow, I can do no good by staying here." So saying he retraced his steps, and hailing a taxi soon found himself once more in Passy.

Entirely ignorant of what had just transpired, Pierre went home to dinner, followed at a little distance by Emile. Hardly was his meal finished when a ring was heard at the door.

"Ah," said Pierre, "I expect that rascal Emile has come to see me. I wonder what he has to say this time."

A moment later Emile was shown into the room.

"I have important news for monsieur," was his opening remark as he laid his hat and cane on a chair.

"Well, be quick and let me know what it is. I have not much time."

"But, before I begin, perhaps monsieur will settle my little account?" said Emile, reflecting that when Pierre heard the news, he would have more important matters to think about than the settlement of the little bill.

"Well, here are two napoleons, that is all I can spare at the moment, and if you don't bring me more news than you have done hitherto you may whistle for any more money from me."

"Oh," replied Emile as he pocketed the coins, "monsieur may be certain that I will give him plenty of news to-night, plenty of news, he may be quite sure."

"Now tell me what you have to say, and be quick about it," said Pierre, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Monsieur will pardon me if I say that my news is not to be told too quickly, and perhaps monsieur himself will see when I have finished that the need for haste is not a matter for me."

While Emile was speaking Pierre nonchalantly turned his back on his visitor and was busying himself with the pages of a railway guide. At the totally unexpected words of Emile, uttered in a quiet and almost dignified manner, the young advocate turned sharply round, and was about to deliver a scathing rebuke to his impertinent employee, but the words died on his lips and a sickening feeling of dread crept over him when he saw Emile draw up a chair and calmly seat himself alongside the small table standing between them. Summoning as much indifference into his tone as he was able to under the circumstances, he said:

"Pray, do not consider me, make yourself quite at home. But I may remark, however, that up to this moment I was under the impression that I was the master here."

"It is my fond hope that monsieur may long remain free to be the master in his own house," replied Emile, looking straight into the eyes of Pierre. "But," he added slowly, "if monsieur will deign to accept the help of his humble ally——"

"Understand me once for all," interrupted Pierre haughtily, "I do not make allies of my servants; if you have any news to report, say briefly what it is. Have you carried out my instructions and obtained information from Dr. Villebois's servants?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have not only gained my news from the servants, but I have obtained most valuable information from the lips of the eminent Dr. Villebois himself."

"Ah, and what had he to say?" asked Pierre anxiously.

"That is the very matter which I desire to discuss with monsieur," replied Emile.

"How do you mean, discuss?" answered Pierre angrily. "You are not here to discuss; your place is to report, and that's what you are paid for. You seem to forget yourself when you talk to me about discussing my business with me."

Nettled at the tone of superiority adopted by Pierre, Emile put up a warning hand to interrupt, "I think monsieur will be very glad to pay me a very large sum of money to make me forget. Sit down, monsieur, sit down," he added, "and we will come to a little arrangement about what Dr. Villebois was good enough to inform your ally and friend."

Something in his visitor's manner and looks caused Pierre to see that the time for bravado and bluff was past, and with a contemptuous sneer at the figure opposite him, he sat down at the further side of the table.

"Monsieur would prefer to smoke perhaps," said Emile insinuatingly. "The cigarette has a wonderfully soothing effect on the nerves when they are shaken."

"Damn you, say what you have to say," snarled Pierre, "and get out of this."

"I would remind monsieur that politeness is not only a great virtue, but on occasions like this it is also the best policy."

"What do you mean by occasions like this? Explain yourself, I do not understand."

"Monsieur will do better not to adopt that tone with me. I am here as his friend if——"

"If what?"

"If it will please monsieur to pay me——"

"Pay you for what?"

"For my devotion to the interests of monsieur in coming to him first with my news instead of going to the prefecture and telling the police that monsieur has murdered Professor Delapine."

"What! Do you insinuate that I murdered the professor? How dare you, scoundrel!" he cried, jumping up from his chair white with passion and fear, while his face gradually became ashy pale, and a cold sweat broke over him. Reaching forward he poured out a full measure of brandy with a trembling hand, and swallowed it down at a gulp. "What are you staring at, you idiot?" he said, trembling all over. "Have you nothing else to tell me? Well then get out, I have no further use for you; and mind, if you breathe a word to a living soul about this, by God, I will kill you like a dog. What are you

doing standing still like a born fool that you are? Get out, I say, do you hear me?" he cried as Emile hesitated to depart.

"I wish to assure monsieur," said Emile, who displayed great control over his voice, but an extraordinary want of tact, "that it was only my great devotion to him that prevented me from informing the police this evening, and monsieur would have been arrested immediately. Now, if monsieur will make me a little present, just enough to make it worth my while——"

"What! you infernal devil," interrupted Pierre, his voice becoming husky with passion as he rose from the table and looked at Emile with eyes blazing with fury. "Do you mean to tell me that you require me to muzzle your mouth with gold in order to secure your silence?"

"Ah! monsieur, we have all got to live, and for a thousand francs—a mere trifle to monsieur—I close my eyes, and for another couple of thousand more I close my lips, and I will never tell the police, or even your father."

"You limb of satan, you hellish fiend. By God, I swear I'll tear your lying tongue out of your mouth, and break every bone in your damned body," cried Pierre, and seizing a champagne bottle he hurled it with all his force at Emile's head as the imp tried to escape from the room. Emile ducked, and the bottle just caught the top of his head, causing a deep gash, and knocking him down as if he had been pole-axed. The blood trickled down his face, and Pierre was afraid for the moment that he had killed him. Hurrying out of the room he fetched a pail of water and some towels, and tying one of them tightly over the wound he soon stopped the bleeding. In a few minutes he had mopped up all the blood, and removed every trace of it from the floor, and seeing that Emile was not seriously hurt, propped him up in a chair and rang the bell.

"Joseph," he said to his servant, as the latter stared at Emile propped up like a Chinese idol with a towel twisted into a turban round his head. "Don't be alarmed, my friend has had the misfortune to cut his head with a champagne bottle as he was opening it, he will soon be all right again. Kindly go and fetch a fiacre as soon as

possible, and see that he is driven to his diggings. By the way, Joseph," he added, "I shan't want you this evening, so you may go out and amuse yourself if you like, and remember," he continued, in as calm a voice as he could command, "not a word about this to anyone. This accident was purely his own fault, and as you see, he is not badly hurt."

"Thank you, sir," said Joseph, as he felt relieved at seeing Emile beginning to wake up. "Have you any further orders, sir?"

"No, Joseph, no, that will do, only be quick and get this fellow out of the way. His presence is getting on my nerves," added Pierre, becoming excited again.

A fiacre was soon brought, and Emile was bundled in.

"Where shall I drive to?" asked the cocher.

"Oh! anywhere you please," said Pierre, who had assisted Joseph in getting him in, "only don't bring him back here."

The cocher drove off, and Emile, recovering somewhat, shouted to the coachman to turn round and drive to the General's house.

As soon as Joseph had departed, Pierre set to work to pack up his possessions, and collect his papers and valuables together.

"Now," he said, consulting a railway time-table, "I shall be able to catch the midnight train for Bordeaux. That will suit me nicely, and I can alter my appearance so that my own mother would not recognise me."

CHAPTER XVIII

FACILIS DECENSUS AVERNI

Revenge at first though sweet, bitter ere long back on itself recoils.
Paradise Lost.

MEANWHILE Emile swore in a way that would have turned the English dragoons in Flanders green with envy. He was thirsting for vengeance and was busy turning over in his mind how he could best pay Pierre back in his own coin, when he found himself at the General's house. Thanks to Villebois and Riche's skill, Duval's bullet wound was so far healed that he was beginning to use his arm, and the movements and sensation of feeling showed that repair had set in vigorously. He was sitting in an easy chair when Emile was ushered into his presence.

"Well, and pray who are you, and what do you want to see me about at this time in the evening?" said Duval, frowning at him and looking very red in the face.

The General scrutinized the visiting card which Robert had just handed to him on a silver salver. Turning it over he examined it thoughtfully, and glanced up at him with a searching gaze.

"What have you been doing to your head?" he enquired.

Emile twisted his fingers, and played with his hat in a nervous fashion. "I met with an accident in the street, and a man ran out of a house and bound it up for me," he replied, cowed and trembling.

"I suppose you think that is the proper way to call on gentlemen of my rank in the evening, is it?"

Emile was beginning to feel faint, and sat down on a chair near the General.

"Get up, sir, this instant. How dare you sit down in the presence of a General of the French army, and without leave too? Parbleu, in my younger days you would have been arrested immediately, and severely punished. Ma foi, the service must be going to the devil. Get up this instant, do you hear me, sir?" he said, as the wretched man was too bewildered and confused to obey the General's orders.

"If you please, mon Général, I have the honour to inform you that—that your son has killed Professor Delapine, and that he will be arrested to-morrow morning for murder."

"What the devil do you mean, sir? Are you mad or what?"

"A thousand pardons, mon Général, I am telling you the naked truth. I have just come from Dr. Villebois's house, and I overheard him say that the moment Dr. Roux's report is presented to-morrow morning at the Parquet, your son, Monsieur Pierre Gaston Duval, will be arrested on the charges of arson and murder."

"What!" exclaimed the General, bounding out of his chair, and seizing the bully by his coat collar and shaking him violently. "Do you mean to tell me that—that——" he burst out in a voice that became incoherent with mingled rage and horror, "that—that—the police intend to—to arrest my son on a charge of murder?"

"It is true, mon Général, I heard Dr. Villebois and Dr. Roux both say so."

The General's eyes nearly started out of his head, and a profuse perspiration collected on his brow. An awful horror seized him, and his chest heaved with convulsive emotion. "My God! to think it has come to this! My only son, the pride of my heart, the heir to all my property, the sole survivor of my family, and to end in disgrace like this," and burying his face in his hands, he sobbed convulsively. Emile toyed with his hat more nervously than ever, and watched the General intently not to miss the effect which his speech had on him.

At length after a painful pause that seemed interminable, Duval stood up, and fastened his eyes with a searching gaze on Emile, while his face twitched convulsively, and

assumed a look which terrified him almost out of his wits.

"What were you doing in Delapine's house to overhear this conversation? Were you invited there?"

"Oh! no, mon Général. I was paid by M. Pierre to watch the house and bring him all the news I could glean."

The General's feelings were working up to the boiling point, and his fury was passing beyond all his powers of control. Emile was on the point of making a bolt for it, but the furious gleam of Duval's eyes rooted him to the spot.

"You infernal sneak, you vile informer, you—you miserable reptile," said the General, with a look of withering contempt on his face, his voice rising in pitch until it almost ended in a shriek, "out with you before I shoot you dead," and suiting his actions to his words, he opened a drawer and pulled out a large army revolver.

But Emile did not wait for Duval to raise the weapon. Before the General had time to cock it, Emile had already bolted out of the room, and hurrying down the stairs, ran out of the front gate as fast as his legs could carry him.

Duval rushed after him and fired several shots, but his wounded arm prevented him from taking a steady aim, and Emile was speedily out of range.

The General returned to his room, and lay down on the sofa in a state of complete exhaustion. Nearly half an hour had elapsed before he was sufficiently recuperated to ring the bell and order the carriage to be got ready. He slowly went upstairs, and put on his uniform assisted by his valet.

"Buckle on my sword as well, Robert, I don't feel my real self without my trusty sword and revolver."

Robert appeared terribly scared at the appearance of his master, but knew him too well to venture on any remark, or to let him perceive that he saw it.

"You need not wait up for me, Robert," he said in a calm and measured voice which presented a marked contrast to his previous excited and furious tones, and now bore traces of strong determination mingled with unutterable sadness. "I don't like to say so, Robert, but I feel somehow that I may be addressing you for the last time. You will have no reason to forget me, Robert, you

have been a faithful servant to me, and I have not forgotten you in my will."

"Oh! mon Général, do not talk like that," said Robert, weeping, "I cannot bear to think that misfortune could overtake you."

The General was deeply moved at the old servant's words, and pouring out a glass of brandy, handed it to him.

Robert for the moment was too astonished to drink it, and looked at his master for some explanation of his altogether unusual conduct.

"Drink it, drink it, my good fellow," said Duval, "I do not like leaving without some slight token of my regard for you," and so saying he filled another glass, and with a nod of approval clinked it against his valet's, and drank to his health.

"May le bon Dieu watch over you," said Robert in a solemn but respectful tone of voice.

"Merci, merci," replied the General nodding to him. "Now leave me, my good man, I am not well," and he shook his head and sighed painfully.

Robert's eyes were filled with tears as he left the room in silence.

It was after nine in the evening when the General arrived at Pierre's rooms. The latter looked out of his window to make sure that it was not a detective, or a member of the police force who stood at the door, and having assured himself on that score, he opened the door and admitted his father.

Duval quietly entered the room without saying a word. He sat down in an armchair and began by looking at Pierre, who was humming a tune, with a steady gaze.

Pierre felt very uncomfortable, and tried to avert his father's looks, but in vain. The silence was beginning to become unbearable, and picking up a newspaper he attempted to read, but the terrible look on his father's face rendered it impossible, and he flung the paper on one side.

"Now, sir, pray explain yourself," said his father very solemnly and slowly in an almost sepulchral voice. I understand from a man who calls himself Emile Deschamps that you have not only attempted to burn Villebois's house down, but you have actually murdered his guest Professor

Delapine, and that to-morrow morning you will be arrested in the name of the law."

"My dear father, what on earth are you talking about? I don't understand a word you're saying."

Pierre opened his cigarette-case, and having selected a cigarette to his satisfaction, proceeded to offer his father one.

"Don't trifle with me, sir. I have come here to demand an answer to my questions, and not to smoke cigarettes with you."

"You can ask me as many questions as you like, but I don't see that I am called upon to answer them," replied Pierre in a huff.

"By God, sir, you shall not leave the room until you have answered them," replied the General, becoming more and more angry.

"Look here, father, I won't have you talk to me as if I were a naughty child. You come here at this absurd hour of the night, and glare at me like a hyæna, and expect me to listen to some yarn about my burning down Villebois's house and murdering Delapine.

"Really, sir," he continued, "you are too funny for words, "you ought to have been a comic actor. Ha! ha! ha!" and Pierre shook with laughter.

"How dare you trifle with me in this manner? Are you aware of the seriousness of this charge?" cried Duval in an awful voice.

"For goodness' sake stop, father, this conversation is becoming too tedious, I really can't stand it any longer," replied Pierre in a languid drawl. "By the way, won't you take a glass of port?"

"Hold your tongue, sir! Will you listen to me or not? You have been accused of having set fire to Villebois's house, and of murdering Professor Delapine. I wish to hear from your own lips; is it true or not?"

"Oh, do shut up, father, and don't play the fool with me any more," replied Pierre, his voice rising almost to a scream. "Is it likely that I, your own son, would dream of doing mad acts like that? The thing is too absurd even to argue about."

"Am I to understand then that you are innocent of both these deeds?"

"Most certainly I am. I swear the whole charge is a dastardly lie, and is without a shadow of foundation."

"Are you prepared to swear this to me on oath? Hold up your hand and swear then," said his father, as Pierre nodded assent.

"I swear before God that the whole story is nothing but a filthy lie," said Pierre, holding up his hand, "and I solemnly call God to witness what I say."

"You are lying, you are deceiving me—I can read it in your face."

"May God strike me dead on the spot if I am deceiving you," replied Pierre in a sudden outburst of passion, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang in order to carry conviction, although he was trembling from head to foot.

"Of course," he continued after a moment's reflection, "if you prefer to believe this damned cad whom you call Emile, rather than your own son, I have nothing more to say."

Duval remained silent for a few moments, fixing on him one of those terrible looks which would have cowed a Bengal tiger, and caused him to slink away.

"Come now, father, for goodness' sake change the subject, and don't waste my time with these absurd accusations," said Pierre, with well-feigned anger, although he was quaking with fear.

"Pierre, I ask you for the last time, do you still persist in your statement that it is all a lie?"

"Of course I do; what else could it be?"

"If it is a lie, then explain to me why you have employed a low sneak to watch the house and inform you from hour to hour what is going on there. Is that a lie also?"

Pierre grew very red in the face and tried to avert his father's gaze, but said nothing.

"Answer me, sir," said Duval with another of his searching looks.

"Oh, father, why do you ask me such ridiculous questions?"

"Ridiculous questions indeed. I suppose you will give that reply to the Juge d'Instruction when you are arraigned on the charge of wilful murder, and when the guillotine is

staring you in the face? Hein!" and Duval looked at him once more with flashing eyes and tightly clenched teeth.

Pierre merely hung down his head.

"Hold up your head, sir," said Duval in a terrible voice, "and look me full in the face. I see your sense of guilt makes you ashamed to do it."

Pierre got up and made as if he would leave the room.

"Halt!" cried the General in a voice of thunder, and going quickly to the door he locked it and put the key in his pocket. "Now, sir, once for all, did you or did you not kill Delapine, and set fire to Villebois's house?"

Pierre could see from his father's face that prevarication was useless, and however much he denied the deed he would refuse to believe him.

"I see you refuse to believe me even when I do tell the truth. Well, as a matter of fact, I did try an *experiment* on Delapine when he was in a trance, with a little liquid which Paul Romaine gave me, and the fluid unfortunately proved too strong for him, and it ended fatally."

"Do you imagine for a moment that the jury will believe that story? Did you set fire to the house as an *experiment* to see whether it would cause the guests to quit the room and leave you free to murder an innocent man? Did you keep away from Villebois's house where you were a 'persona grata,' and a welcome guest, and employ a spy as an *experiment* to watch the house for you? Hein!"

"I see it is useless to argue with you, father, so I shall hold my tongue."

"You are not only an incendiary and a murderer," said Duval in a voice trembling with emotion, "but what, if possible, is worse, you are a liar! and a coward, sir! I disown you for ever as my son, but I cannot allow you to disgrace my name and that of our family by being put in prison, and handed over to the executioner as a felon," and so saying he quietly drew his loaded revolver and laid it on the table.

Deliberately rising up, he unlocked the door, saying as he did so, "I shall return in a quarter of an hour," and shutting it, locked it on the outside.

Duval went out of the house and paced up and down in

front of the window of the room where his son was standing, and nervously looked at his watch from time to time.

Punctually, in a quarter of an hour he returned, and unlocking the door, looked at Pierre with a face of unutterable disgust. His eyelids were raised to their full extent showing the whites all round, while his pupils dilated and glistened with rage and emotion as he stood bolt upright with his head in the air like the brave old soldier that he was.

"Coward," he hissed, "so you have not even the courage to preserve your father's name. Well then, since you have not the courage, I must do it for you," and taking up the revolver he pointed it at Pierre's heart.

But Pierre loved life too well to be despatched without a struggle, and before Duval had time to pull the trigger, his son made a sudden dart at him and dashed the revolver aside, and at the same time closing with the General, threw him on to the ground. Under ordinary circumstances Duval's superior strength would have made it an easy task for him to render Pierre powerless, but the pain in his injured arm became so excruciating that it gave Pierre every advantage over him. Duval still held on to his revolver, and endeavoured to fire at his son's body, but as he was in the act of pulling the trigger during the heat of the struggle, Pierre unintentionally twisted his father's hand round at the moment when the revolver was going off. The trigger fell, and the bullet passed right through Duval's heart. Pierre instantly released him, and getting up observed his father give a few convulsive gasps and fall back dead.

He gazed on him with a wild look of terror, and falling on his neck, gave way to his feelings of grief. But his remorse soon changed to alarm for his own safety, and he fervently thanked his stars that he had sent his servant out for the evening.

His first task was to open the window wide, and then taking his father's money out of his pocket, he scattered a few coins on the floor, and upset some of the furniture. The rest of the money together with his father's gold watch, keys, and revolver, he transferred to his own pockets.

Pierre carefully locked the door on the inside, and

climbing out of the window he re-entered the house by the front door, and picking up his valaise and portmanteau (which he had previously packed) straightway left the house.

A couple of streets further on he hailed a cab and bid the cocher drive to his father's house. He kept the cab waiting while he let himself into the house with Duval's latchkey, and made his way to the library where his father kept the safe.

It was only the work of a few minutes to open the safe and tumble all the bank-notes, securities, and other valuables into a small portmanteau. Hurriedly grasping this, he ran downstairs and re-entered the fiacre.

"Drive to the Quai D'Orsay Station," he called to the cocher. As soon as the fiacre stopped, Pierre went quickly into the lavatory and washed off a few traces of blood which had splashed on his clothes.

"Thank God, no one can recognise me now," he muttered, as he proceeded to shave off his moustache, and adjust a set of false whiskers and a small beard which he had taken the precaution to pack away in his valaise. "Ha! Ha! Why, my own mother wouldn't know me," he added as he peered into the mirror with a look of satisfaction.

An hour later he bid good-bye to Paris, and found himself rapidly travelling in the direction of Bordeaux.

CHAPTER XIX

THE VIGIL

"Anche la Speme*
Ultima Dea, fugge i sepolchri e involve
Tutte cose l'Oblio nella sua notte."
FOSCOLO.—*Dei Sepolcri.* 16.

"Nus rein avoir grant joie
S'il n'en sueffre paine." (PIERRE DE CORBIE.)

"The ghost in man, the ghost that once was man,
But cannot wholly free itself from man,
Are calling to each other thro' a dawn
Stranger than earth has ever seen—the veil
Is rending, and the voices of the day
Are heard across the voices of the dark."
TENNYSON.

DELAPINE had been laid in the spare bedroom which had been partly altered into a sitting room and made as comfortable as possible. Madame Villebois had placed a small table just behind the head of the bed, and covered it with a white cloth. On it she devoutly placed a crucifix, together with a large wax candle on each side, which she gave directions should be kept burning all night. Two more candles were placed on small round tables at the foot of the bed.

"Now, my dear," said the good lady to her spouse, "I have turned the room into a little 'chapelle ardente.'"

Doctor Villebois nodded approval—but his mind turned to the practical rather than the spiritual needs of the professor.

"Let us put a stove in the room," he added, "so that it may be kept at a constant temperature of summer heat.

*"Last of the Gods, e'en Hope the tomb doth flee, and in its night Oblivion doth all mortal things enfold."

Renée insisted on sleeping in the room with a Sister of Mercy who had been called in to assist at the vigil during the night, while during the day Rénee and Céleste agreed to take turns in watching.

"Is this the room where the tragedy took place?" asked Paul as the two doctors were shown into the room by Villebois.

"No, that was downstairs. This room has been specially prepared for the professor."

Paul went up to Delapine, who was lying white as marble and apparently lifeless.

"Yes, there is the syringe mark right enough."

Seizing the arm, he inserted a sterilised probe and then forcibly squeezed the skin. A few drops of yellowish fluid came out. He collected it on a watch glass and warmed it over a spirit flame. A tiny white deposit remained.

"Let me put this under your microscope," he said to Dr. Villebois. It was brought, and he carefully examined the crystals.

"I thought so. These are the crystals of the Japanese alkaloid right enough. There can be no doubt about what his condition is due to."

"What do you think about him?" asked Roux.

"He is either dead or will die very shortly."

Renée looked up with her heart thumping violently, apparenty unable to grasp the full significance of the calamity.

"Oh! please, doctor," she said, rushing up to him and falling on her knees at his feet, "don't say that. Can't you give me any hope?"

Roux and Paul were visibly affected, and the latter patted her on the head to try and comfort her.

"I am afraid, mademoiselle, I cannot give you any hope," said Roux with a sorrowful look.

"But, Doctor, if he is not really dead, you won't surely allow him to be buried, will you?"

"No, no, you may be sure I won't allow that. I promise you that we will get an order from the Minister of the Interior to leave him here until there can be no question whatever as to his being dead or alive, and Roux and I have already sent our report to the Parquet with a request to that effect."

"I quite agree," said Paul, "to what you say, in fact, anything else would be criminal."

Two days later Dr. Roux received the following letter from Villebois:—

MON CHER DOCTEUR,

The Parquet, after hearing the report which you and Monsieur Biron were good enough to give in this extraordinary case, has granted my petition that Delapine's body may remain unburied until it has been ascertained with absolute certainty that he is really dead, but I am sorry to tell you, mon ami, that you and Monsieur Biron are under the obligation to give the Parquet a detailed report every day concerning Delapine's condition, thus giving you both, I regret to say, a considerable amount of work.

Not only ourselves and the members of the Parquet, but all Paris—France—the whole world, are anxiously awaiting the solution of this wonderful riddle. The strain is telling on my nerves, and I really feel too ill to do any work. The whole house is becoming disorganized. Madame Villebois has been compelled to take to her bed, and my daughter Céleste and Mademoiselle Renée are taking turns to watch the professor in a room we have specially prepared for him. Reporters and other inquisitive people are calling all day long for news. A guard has been stationed at the front door by the kind permission of the Parquet to keep them away as much as possible, but it is needless to add that you, mon cher confrère, will always be welcome at any hour of the day.

Toujours à vous,

ADOLPHE VILLEBOIS.

Dr. Villebois was compelled to abandon his practice for the time being, and devote himself to his mysterious patient. Dr. Riche offered to share all responsibility with him—an offer which needless to say was most cordially accepted.

Almost every hour of the day Riche would enter the bedroom and examine the thermometer to make sure that an even temperature was maintained. He had just entered the room and looked at Renée who was sitting down holding Céleste's hand, the picture of abject misery. Renée closed her eyes, her lips trembled while she emitted a half-suppressed sigh, feeling too sad to think or speak. From time to time she put her hand to her head as if she felt a pain there, and heaved a little sigh. All hope seemed

extinguished, and left nothing but an empty longing in her heart. And now the sun was eclipsed. Her dream of love had become a ghastly nightmare. A fearful and unknown terror seemed to possess her. "Listen," her heart seemed to say, "listen to the rustling of the wings of the Death-Angel as he hovers over you. You have lost your protector. Pandora's box is empty. Hope, the sole remaining gift, has escaped and fled. There is nothing more to live for. All that remains is black, hopeless despair. Why hesitate any longer? Make away with yourself."

With such thoughts of undiluted misery, she lay down on the couch longing for comfort which never came, eager for someone to come and comfort her, and yet at the same time half hoping that she might be left alone.

"Oh! Henri, Henri, my beloved, come back, come back to me or I shall die."

She felt like a little wounded bird left alone in the nest to perish.

The next day Riche, who was somewhat of an electrician, brought in a couple of dry-cell batteries and fixed the wires so that the faintest movement of Delapine's head or limbs would complete the circuit in the wires and ring an alarm.

"There," he said to Renée when he had finished, "if the professor moves hand or foot as little as the twentieth part of an inch, the alarm will be heard ringing all over the house, and will continue until the circuit is broken again."

Suddenly the alarm bell, which was one of the largest size, rang with an indescribable din. Renée jumped up with a cry, while Céleste, Marcel and Payot came rushing into the room.

"What is it, what is it?" they all cried.

"Nothing," replied Riche, "I was merely testing the apparatus. See," he continued, "I will move the professor's hand the fraction of an inch." Immediately the gong sounded, and everyone started. Then he tested each limb in the same way, and always with the same result. Next he examined the thermometer which he had placed in Delapine's mouth the day before. It showed a temperature of 75° Fahrenheit. Then he looked at the thermometer

on the wall. It showed 70° Fahrenheit. He smiled and gave utterance to an exclamation of pleasure and surprise.

"What's the matter, doctor?" asked Renée, sitting up as she watched Riche's face closely.

"I have good news—not very good, but still better than nothing. The body is five degrees warmer than the air of the room. If it were only the same temperature it would be a serious matter, but for it to be higher is a very good sign."

"Oh God, I thank Thee for this small mercy," said Renée, folding her hands and bowing her head devoutly. She hurriedly left the room, and a few minutes afterwards Riche heard the music of her violin.

He opened the door and listened. He heard the opening notes of Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata."

"My God," he said to himself, "what feeling, what execution! surely the professor's spirit must have entered the child." He listened enraptured. Stealing out of the room with Céleste and Marcel, he found Villebois and Madame Villebois standing at the half-opened door of the library not daring to enter lest they should break the spell.

Then the air changed, and the "Ave Maria of Schubert" caught his enraptured ear.

After a pause she laid her violin down, and with closed eyes like a blind child she walked across to the organ. The fearful strain of the last few days on her nerves had exhausted her feeble frame, and she was evidently in a somnambulistic state.

Villebois with his medical training observed it immediately, and not daring to break the spell, worked the bellows for her.

She played a few chords, and then caught up that magnificent air of Handel's *Messiah*—"I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Riche had never felt so devout before. He had always regarded God merely as a convenient substantive when suitably qualified, to express his feelings with. Since he was a child he had never entered a church unless it were with an opera glass and a Baedecker in his hand, and now for the first time he felt a sort of consciousness of some unknown influenee, some faint divine inspiration

filling his soul. Accustomed as he had been in Morocco and Algiers to witness terrible scenes of cruelty and oppression unmoved, and to mingle in camp life with brutal soldiers, Turcos, and men who had been transferred to the frightful discipline of the Algerian foreign legion, the sweet almost angelic pathos of this girl in her exultation at the faint signs of life in her lover which Riche had revealed to her, exercised a subtle influence over his soul, which was something weird and strange to him. He felt his tears beginning to flow, and ashamed of his weakness he wiped them away and struggled to suppress them, but in spite of all his efforts they continued to dim his eyes. He looked up half ashamed of himself, but discovered the others completely overcome.

Even Marcel, the gay and frivolous cynic, usually all laughter and jokes, remained standing behind the others in a deep reverie, while Madame Villebois was sobbing convulsively.

At length Renée ceased playing, and the company dispersed, afraid lest their presence should break the spell. Silently she glided along, her eyes staring widely open, her hands outstretched before her, and her head turned upwards. She walked upstairs apparently fast asleep, and opening the door of the professor's chamber, proceeded straight to his bed. All the company followed breathlessly, and saw her bend over his form, and clasping him in her arms implanted a long and passionate kiss on his cold lips. Tears streamed down her cheeks and trickled down Delapine's face.

The death-like silence was terrible. Not a sound could be heard save the ticking of the clock. One could almost hear her breathing. Finally she left him, and still half unconscious lay down on her bed in a peaceful slumber.

No one dared to break the silence, and at length they all passed out of the room one by one to attend to their several occupations, or try and collect their thoughts.

A week passed away and then another week, and still Delapine lay unconscious in the same position.

Day by day Monsieur Biron called for news.

"Yes," said Villebois one morning in answer to his enquiries, "the professor lies there still unchanged in his death-like sleep."

"Do you mean to say he is not dead then?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Villebois, "but if he is not alive there are no signs of death."

"C'est une merveille, I cannot comprehend it," exclaimed Biron, holding up his hands and shrugging his shoulders.

"May I be permitted to look at him?" he asked.

"With pleasure, monsieur le commissaire."

Monsieur Biron entered the chamber of death with a slow and methodical step as became his dignity as an officer of the law, and proceeded to place his hat and stick on a chair. "Yes, who can tell?" he said, shrugging his shoulders, and looking up at the doctor for some reply. "Well, well, we shall see n'est-ce pas?" and he shrugged his shoulders, as if he felt somehow that the law wanted remodelling in order to be able to deal with such cases. After a short pause he rose and shook hands with Villebois in rather a patronising way, and bowing profoundly, left the house in an uncertain frame of mind, but fully convinced that he had performed a most meritorious duty.

Another day, a few weeks later, Dr. Roux came in, and taking a careful note of everything, examined the thermometer which perpetually remained in Delapine's mouth. He compared it with the thermometer on the wall, which remained at a constant temperature of about 68° F. He compared the figures with the chart on which the daily temperature was entered. "This is very strange!" he exclaimed, and hastening out of the room he ran downstairs to see Villebois.

"Dr. Villebois, are you there? Pray come here at once," he called out breathlessly.

"What's the matter?" cried Villebois, laying down his pen, and looking up at Roux who ran up to him and laid his hand on his shoulder in a state of great excitement.

"Come at once and look, Delapine's temperature has risen to 82° Fahrenheit."

Villebois jumped out of his chair with a bound. "C'est une merveille," he said as he flew upstairs after Roux who happened to have just called.

"Is it really true . . . what can it mean?" cried Roux in

a state of great excitement. He ran up to the professor and examined the thermometer with impatience. "You are right, doctor, quite right. It stands exactly as you said at 82° F. There can be no doubt about that. But what does it mean?"

"Who knows. But it looks favourable, doesn't it? His body is certainly not undergoing any decomposition, and therefore a rise of temperature must imply that the physiological functions of the body are beginning to assert themselves once more in some silent mysterious fashion."

The vigil continued day after day without a moment's interruption. Riche and Villebois took turns to relieve Céleste and Renée, but the latter insisted on always sleeping in the room. Often she would get up in the small hours of the morning, and with a night lamp in her hand would examine the thermometers, and bending over the professor would breathe a tender lover's kiss on his lips, and then creep back into bed.

Paul took an intense interest in the case, and insisted on Villebois telephoning him every detail often two or three times a day.

More than three months had passed away since Delapine first became unconscious, and still no signs of returning life appeared. One day about the middle of January of the following year, Paul happened to call, and going up to Delapine distinctly noticed a slight tremor of the facial muscles. He stood spellbound, and then happening to examine the thermometer found to his surprise that it indicated 90° F. He ran into the library where Villebois and Riche happened to be sitting, and at once communicated the discovery to them.

A veritable flutter in the dovecot followed. Telephonic messages were at once sent to Monsieur Biron, Roux, and to several of the most eminent professors and specialists at the various hospitals in Paris, for the mysterious case had become the daily topic of conversation among all the faculty. A great consultation was held in the library among all these learned doctors, and voluminous notes were taken. But although a vast amount of erudition was put forth, no one was able to offer any practical suggestions, and hence nothing came of it.

"Mais mon Dieu!" said one of the great men, "what can we do? We can only wait patiently until something happens."

A few days later Renée was lying in her bed about midnight in a semi-drowsy condition, when she suddenly saw a bright light floating like a nimbus over Delapine's head. She gave a little scream, and then becoming more and more awake gazed on it with intense fascination. At first it moved slightly, and then growing larger and larger began to condense into the form of a human face. Slowly the features developed, until at length it assumed the form of her mother. By degrees the entire body appeared clothed in white drapery, and slowly made its way towards Renée with a sweet smile on her face. As the light of the room increased Renée recognised her features, and springing out of bed she ran into her arms. "Oh, mother!" she cried, "Is that really you?"

"Yes, I am your mother, and am come to tell you that Henri will very soon wake up, and you will be able to see him as he was, and to hear him talk."

Renée seized her by both hands and squeezed them.

"Mother dear, that is too good to be true. Do you really mean it?"

"Of course I do. You know I never told you a lie, and why should I tell you one now?"

Renée's eyes fairly danced with delight as she heard the welcome news, and she clapped her hands for joy.

"But tell me, how are you, mother? Are you very happy?"

"I am very happy," her mother replied. "The life on the other side is merely a continuation of this, only without its limitations."

"Do you suffer pain like you used to so often, mother?"

"No, Renée, there is no pain beyond the grave. Here you are subjected to natural laws. You are tied down to the earth by the action of gravity. But we are free from all these restrictions. We can go where we please at will in an instant of time. Time and space have no limitation for us."

"Shall I join you soon, mother?"

"No, Renée, you have a mission to perform and a great

deal of work to do yet, and I think you will have a long and happy life in company with your fiancé."

"But how did you possibly know of our engagement? Has anyone told you?"

"Have I not been by your side off and on ever since I left you, my child? Do you suppose a mother can ever forget her daughter?"

"Of course not," replied Renée, "but at the same time I never imagined that you would be able to see me."

"You could not see me now but for your lover's presence."

"What do you mean, mother?"

"I mean what I say, dear. Henri has come back to earth, and I have been using his body to form materialistic substance to clothe my spirit with, so that you are enabled to see me with your own eyes."

Renée jumped up at hearing this with an exclamation of joy as the thought of Henri's return began to dawn on her mind. "Do you really mean to say that Henri is back again, and that he will be the same old darling he was before?"

"Why of course I do. My presence is the proof positive that his spirit has returned. To-morrow he will wake up and in a very short time he will be quite well again."

Renée clapped her hands for sheer joy, and gave her mother a close embrace.

"Oh! mother, how very strange to think that I never knew you were so near. Why is it that you have never shown yourself to me before, except for a moment when Henri was in a trance?"

"I can only reveal myself to you in the presence of a medium who happens to be in a state of trance at the time, because I have to clothe myself with the earthly particles of his body which I subtract from it when he is in that condition, as I cannot do it when he is awake. If you were to weigh Henri now you would find half his weight gone."

Renée looked at Delapine's body, and to her horror she saw it had shrunk to two-thirds its former size, but her mother calmed her and reassured her at once.

"You need not be in the least alarmed, my darling,

he will get all his substance restored to him the moment I am gone."

"Oh! mother, how you did frighten me," she said, "but do you manufacture the drapery you are wearing, as well as your body, out of the substance of his body as well?"

"Yes, everything, and in a few moments, without the least difficulty."

"Why do you surround yourself with such thick white stuff?"

"The drapery is thrown out to protect our psychic bodies from the light which acts injuriously on us when materialized," her mother replied.

"Now, Renée dear, I must leave you because I cannot hold my power any longer, and besides it will injure Delapine if I do, as although he has returned to his body, he is so very weak that a very little thing might really kill him now. I will come again and see you very soon."

Her mother kissed her affectionately on both cheeks, and then relaxing her hold, she slowly melted down into the ground and vanished.

Renée was too excited to sleep any more that night, so she got up and lit the lamp.

She held it close to Delapine, and to her surprise she saw that he had returned to his former size and weight.

As she continued to gaze on his features, she noticed that the muscles of his face twitched. Suddenly Delapine moved his fingers, which caused the bell to ring so loudly that it woke up all the household, and they all came running into the room attired in their dressing gowns, or the first garments that they could lay their hands on.

"What is the matter?" they all exclaimed. "Have any thieves got into the house?"

"Oh! no," said Renée, smiling, "it was Delapine who rang the bell. He moved his hands, I saw him do it, and immediately the bell sounded."

"Are you sure of this?" they all cried with one voice.

"As certain as that I am standing here," she replied.

They all looked at the professor, and distinctly observed the muscles of his face twitch.

"I think we will sit up to-night and watch him, what do you say to that, Riche?"

The doctor agreed, and accordingly they made themselves as comfortable as they could in a couple of armchairs.

The next morning they examined the thermometer. It had risen to 93° F. A faint flush suffused the professor's cheek, and a slight but distinct pulsation could be felt.

The event was telegraphed all over Europe, and crowds of savants and doctors came and left their cards, but no one was admitted by the doctor's orders. The ringing of the bell occurred so often that it became a nuisance, and Villebois had it removed.

The next day the temperature touched 98° Fahrenheit and Delapine opened and closed his eyes and looked around him. He moved his limbs slowly and even attempted to sit up, but the effort was too great, and he sank back again on his pillow.

A consultation was arranged forthwith, and half a dozen of the most celebrated physicians in Paris came to the house.

Renée was in the seventh heaven of delight as she heard her name whispered in her ear as she bent over him that evening. He made signs that he wanted food, and the doctors agreed to give him some beef-essence. A few days afterwards about three in the morning Renée's mother appeared again. "Renée," she said, "I am about to be called away, and must leave you for good."

"For good, mother? You don't mean to say that I shall not see you any more?" said Renèe, looking very distressed.

"I must go, dear, but Henri will take my place. When you pass over to the other side you will see me as often as you please, but now I must leave you."

"Mother dear, won't you give me some keepsake?"

"Bring me a pair of scissors and I will cut off a lock of my hair." So saying her mother snipped off one of her light golden curls, and giving her a long tender embrace slowly vanished out of her sight. Renée looked around her. She was alone save for the form of her lover. It all seemed like a wonderful dream, and she rubbed her eyes to make sure she was awake. "I must have been dreaming," she said, but no, here was the lock of her mother's beautiful silky hair in her hand. That at any

rate was no dream, and was proof positive that someone had brought it, and that her vision was not a dream but a stern reality. Renée kissed the lock of hair, and carefully put it away in one of her little treasure boxes.

"Ah! how many happy hours I have spent in playing with that beautiful hair, and now to think that I should actually handle it again. Who would ever have thought it possible? How sorry I feel for the poor poet Cowper when the only thing he had left of his beloved mother was her portrait, and which he immortalised in those beautiful lines which my governess taught me:—

"'Oh that those lips had language! Life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thine own sweet smile I see,
The same that oft in childhood solaced me;
Faithful remembrances of one so dear,
O welcome guest, though unexpected here!
My mother! When I learnt that thou wast dead,
Say wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unfelt, a kiss,
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.'"

She showed the lock of hair to Riche and Marcel, but they only smiled and shook their heads when she told them that her mother had cut it off from her own head only the night before.

"No, no, mademoiselle, you can't make us believe that your mother really appeared to you in the flesh and cut off a lock of her hair with a pair of scissors, and handed it to you."

"But I assure you, doctor, it is perfectly true."

"The vigil has been too much for Renée, poor child," said Riche to Villebois as they were discussing the vision. "Her reason has broken down under the strain."

"Yes," said Villebois, "I agree that we must send her away for a change somewhere, or she will have brain fever, or lose her reason altogether."

"I am afraid that those visions of her mother show that she has lost her senses already," said Riche.

"But how do you account for the lock of hair?" said Villebois.

"Why it's Renée's own hair of course, or else that of her maid."

"Well it can't be that of her maid, because that is raven black."

"I don't believe the tale for a moment," said Riche with a smile of contempt for such an ignorant superstition.

"Well look at the two side by side as I have done, and you will change your opinion. They are as different as day from night. Renée's hair has a brownish colour, whereas her mother's is of a light golden colour." He showed them both side by side to Riche but he merely shrugged his shoulders. He had seen so many wonderful things lately that he had ceased to scoff, but felt it prudent to keep silent.

At the end of the week Delapine's temperature had risen to normal (98.4° F.) and he had so far recovered that he was able to walk downstairs and sit in the study.

Renée was in constant attendance. No hospital nurse could have looked after him better, and certainly no one in the world could have replaced her in Delapine's eyes.

"Oh! Villebois, mon ami," he would say as he lay on the sofa a few days later, I have had a most marvellous sleep, and a wonderful recovery, but you cannot imagine in your wildest dreams what wonderful adventures and experiences I have had."

"Adventures!" they all exclaimed, "What adventures? Why, you have been lying down in your bed upstairs for months past watched by us in turn day and night without a moment's cessation, and now you talk of adventures. It's we who have had the adventures, not you. Strange things have happened since that memorable evening when you went off in the trance-sleep. Are you aware, professor, that Pierre attempted to murder you by injecting a subtle poison into your arm?"

"Enough of that," said Delapine, "I know it all. Didn't you get my letter, Renée, in which I pointed it all out to you, and entreated you not to allow me to be touched or buried?"

"Rather! Why, Henri, Dr. Riche brought it to me, and it was that letter which saved your life by convincing Riche and Villebois that you were not dead, and so pre-

venting the autopsy. Oh! how thankful I was when I read it. It gave me new life—in fact I am sure if I had not received some such encouragement I should have died of grief."

"Thank God that you saw the letter in time," replied Delapine, "I had a strange premonition that all this was going to happen, and so I prepared for it by giving you the sealed envelope."

"Let us not talk about it now, Henri, you are under my orders and I cannot allow my patient to get excited."

"Well, wait a few days until I get stronger, and then I will dictate to you my experiences, and you shall write them down, and we will publish a book about them. I think they will make good reading. You must know, Renée, that the moment I went into the deep sleep or trance, my soul (or Ego) left the body and went far away, and only returned to it about the 19th January."

"Why that was when dear mother came to see me."

"Precisely," Delapine nodded. "She was watching over you all the time, but she was unable to reveal herself in a visible tangible form, unless there was a suitable medium who was en rapport with her. Fortunately I was such a medium, and the moment I returned to my body she seized the opportunity which she had been long waiting for to reveal herself to you in bodily form by building herself out of the particles of my body."

"How strange!" they all exclaimed.

"Yes," said the professor, "I have studied these things deeply. I have discovered that all spiritualistic phenomena are governed by laws which are just as fixed and unalterable as are the laws which govern all the phenomena of this visible world. We have only to learn and understand how spiritual phenomena are produced and controlled by these laws, to extend our conquest over the invisible world of science in the same way that we have extended our knowledge over the visible world of science during the last three hundred years. Spiritual science is only in the same stage of knowledge and advancement in which electricity was at the time of Volta, or steam at the time of Watt."

"Oh, do tell us about it," they all said.

But no answer came. The professor's excitement had

proved too much for him in his weak state, and when they looked at him he was sleeping peacefully as a little child with a happy smile on his face.

"Hush," said Renée, and she put her fingers to her lips.

All the guests crept out of the room in silence, leaving Renée alone to nurse her lover.

Day by day Delapine grew stronger, thanks to the careful nursing of Renée and to the medical skill of Riche and Villebois.

A week later the professor walked out into the garden, for the first time, with a stick, and sat down in the summer-house.

"Ah, yes, this is where I had my last cup of coffee, if I remember rightly."

"Yes," replied Riche and Céleste together, "and if you had drunk it you would not be here to tell the tale."

"But the insectivorous plant would, eh! Renée?" said Delapine with a comical smile. "Well I have got to thank Pierre after all. For if he had not injected that wonderful liquid into my arm I should never have made those wonderful discoveries, and had those extraordinary adventures which I have experienced all these months. Yes, I promise you I shall have them all in writing before long, and I trust I shall be spared to see you all enjoy reading them."

"But before you dictate them, professor, it is imperative that you have a change and re-establish your health, and we shall want you to take a trip somewhere."

"Yes, yes, I have provided for all that. I intend going to Monte Carlo."

"What!" they all exclaimed, "to Monte Carlo?"

'Why not?" he replied.

"Oh, but you surely do not mean to go there to play at the tables?"

"Why not?" he repeated.

"But, professor, we never knew you were a gambler."

"Well, well, it is part of my programme, and you will see how necessary it will be. It is true I am not a gambler, but I have resolved to play at the tables. Now, no more questions, or Renée will turn you all out of the garden," and Delapine laughed in his own hearty way.

"What a marvellous man," said Riche to Villebois.

"Oh, you don't know him yet, just wait a bit and see."

CHAPTER XX

THE NEW JERUSALEM GOLD MINE

En vieillissant on devient plus fou et plus sage
LA ROCHEFOUCAULD. *Maximes*, 210.

Quien Mucho abarca poco a prieta. (Spanish Proverb.)

PAYOT'S financial schemes had not been flourishing of late. The Morocco concessions for very obvious reasons had unavoidably fallen through, and the financier's credit was none of the best.

It is a well-known fact that many men finding their business affairs going from bad to worse, revert to speculation with a view of retrieving their fallen fortunes. The general result of this policy is that instead of quietly setting about putting their house in order so as to stop the debacle, they get dragged deeper and deeper into the mire of financial ruin. Unfortunately for Payot, who was naturally rather a weak and credulous character, matters had almost reached that acute and alarming stage with him, and he proved no exception to the rule.

One day after the termination of his visit to Dr. Villebois's house, while sitting comfortably in his armchair after dinner, a portly looking gentleman with a clean-shaven, very red and puffy face, was announced.

"Monsieur le Baron D'Ormontagne," said the butler, handing M. Payot the visitor's card.

The baron appeared to be about forty-five years of age, with a digestive apparatus of vast dimensions, which was screened off by a white waistcoat carrying a gold chain with links like a cable. His nose was very large and decidedly curved, and this, together with his fleshy under-

lip and double chin, betrayed both his affluence and his Hebrew origin. The baron was known among his former associates as Moses Goldberg, but fortune having favoured him of late, he felt that his position warranted his assuming the more ambitious title of Baron D'Ormontagne, which of course meant the same thing, only it sounded very differently.

"Pray sit down, baron," said Payot, handing him a chair, and looking him up and down as if he were about to measure him for a suit of clothes. "What service may I have the pleasure to render you?"

The baron who was very wheezy, commenced operations by drawing a large red bandana handkerchief from the recesses of his capacious coat pocket, and after a few flourishes, began coughing violently and clearing his throat.

"I presume I have the distinguished honour and good fortune to address M. Felix Payot, am I correct?"

"Yes, that is my name," said Payot.

"I have here a letter of introduction from M. Armand who has known me for years, and he has unbounded faith in my admirable judgment and great business capacity," and so saying he handed the letter to the financier.

Payot scanned the letter, and carefully folding it, placed it on the table.

"You know him well, do you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Payot, "I have known him for many years."

"Ah then, I see we are friends at once," said the baron, rubbing his hands in his eagerness to commence his acts of friendship. "To count upon a financier like you, my dear monsieur, as one's friend is an unexpected pleasure."

At this moment a butler entered and handed him a liqueur on a salver.

"No, thank you," said the baron, throwing forward the palms of his hands as if he were pushing a boat from the landing stage, "I have just had dinner—well, as you press me—I really cannot refuse. What was I saying? Oh, yes, I remember—I have just returned from Mexico where I discovered a very valuable gold mine of outstanding richness. You will be astonished when I show you the

prospectus—and the samples—ah, such samples. Voila," and spreading the crimson handkerchief on the table, he emptied into it a small heap of quartz rock studded with gold nuggets as large as peas. "What do you think of that, mon cher, for a gold mine? Is it not superb?" and the baron rubbed his hands together as if he were lathering them with air. "Fifty-six, or is it a hundred and fifty-six ounces to the ton," he continued, "I really forget which. But no matter, you will see it in the prospectus. And there are thousands and thousands of tons—in fact a small mountain of it, and the reef crops up like currants in a cake. Examine the reef where you will, you always find the same thing—quartz studded with gold, or gold studded with quartz. It is positively like prospecting the vaults of the Bank of France. The mine positively reeks with gold. I discovered it purely by accident. I was travelling over the Sierras and lost my way. Feeling tired I sat down on an outcrop of rock, and casually picked up a loose chunk to throw at a rabbit near me. The piece of stone felt so heavy that I examined it, and to my delight and surprise I found it simply scintillating with bits of gold. Ma foi, you may be sure I marked the place well, and returning with a couple of friends I pegged it out and registered my claim in the city of Mexico. Now, here is the prospectus I have drawn out. Read it carefully and to-morrow, my dear friend, I shall come again, if you will be good enough to fix a time?"

"Say the same time to-morrow," said Payot.

"Excellent, excellent, nothing like doing business at once. That is my plan, and I owe all my success in business to it. And now, mon ami, I will leave you to think over it. I see you are unable to digest any more. It is a dream—a dream, n'est-ce pas? Such a mine has never yet been seen in the world. But so true—so true. Ah, you will never again in your lifetime have such a chance as this. Ah," he said as he rose to leave, "you are admiring my watch-chain? Everyone does, it is such a marvel. Each link, sir, was forged from gold taken from this very mine. Feel its weight, sir, eh?" and he gave a greasy smile of plutocratic opulence and contentment. Carefully dusting his white cotton spats with the red

handkerchief, he took hold of Payot's hands and shook them effusively. "My dear monsieur," he continued, "this has been the greatest evening of my life. The thought of sharing this find with you—so rich that I have christened it the New Jerusalem Mine—just causes my happiness to bubble over."

"But why did you call it the New Jerusalem?" asked Payot.

"What name could be more appropriate? New Jerusalem—descending from Heaven—gates of pearls—streets of shining gold—my mine to a T. What could be finer as an illustration? To-morrow then at eight p.m. Au revoir, au revoir, mon brave," he said, as the butler in answer to the bell appeared at the door and opened it to its full extent, while the wheezy gentleman with his vast display of waistcoat toddled out of the room, bowing profusely.

"A queer sort of card that," thought Payot to himself as he opened the prospectus and proceeded to examine it.

If Payot thought that the baron was piling on the abnormal richness of the mine too thickly, he found to his surprise that the report of Monsieur Alexandre Norcier, the mining engineer, went considerably further. It was certainly an able report, but the fabulous richness of the reef absolutely staggered him. His eyes glistened with excitement and greed.

"Ah," he said to himself, "if this mine is only a quarter as rich as the old baron makes out, I shall be one of the richest men in all Paris. Just think what power it will give me. What would old Duval have given to have a third share in it? I believe he would have sold his immortal soul to the Devil—aye a hundred times over. Well, there's no knowing, it may be true after all. Anyhow, I'll call on Norcier and Armand to-morrow and see what they have to say."

When Payot fell asleep that night with his imagination already heated by the story told by the baron, he dreamt that he was filling trucks with nuggets of gold, and that they were being carted to the Mint every day of the year. When his fabulous wealth became known he was invited as the piece de resistance to the receptions at every Court

in Europe. Daughters of royal blood strove in bevies to compete for his hand, and the President of the Republic decorated him with the Grand Cordon of the Legion d'Honeur, and the King of England with the Order of the Garter. Mighty schemes of reform filtered through his brain. He would rebuild Paris at his own expense on a scale that would dazzle humanity. He would fill the parks with statues rivalling those of Greece. He would erect palaces, museums, places of amusement far surpassing the Golden House of Nero. He would line the banks of the Seine with the choicest trees and flowers that the whole world could offer. He would deepen the Seine so as to form a ship-canal with a depth sufficient to admit the Oceanics, Imperators, and other sea monsters right up to the very quays of Paris.

Next morning he woke with a violent headache, and it required several cups of café au rhum, combined with repeated doses of phenacetin to get him out of bed.

The fresh air outside revived him, and thinking a walk would do him good, he proceeded on foot to Norcier's business offices.

"Pardon me, M. Norcier," he remarked as he sat down, "but I had an interview with our friend the Baron D'Ormontagne yesterday, and he gave me an account of his new gold mine in Mexico. So I thought you would not mind if I asked you for a few details concerning it.

"With pleasure, M. Payot, as a matter of fact I have greatly undervalued its richness; to be candid, in my report I have cut down everything to half so as to be well on the safe side. Do you not approve?"

"Most certainly, Monsieur Norcier, most certainly I do. Do you consider it a really safe speculation?"

"My dear sir, I would not recommend it to you at all but for three reasons. Firstly, your name is one to play with, it represents such honour and integrity that it will give our syndicate great weight, and for that reason we intend, should you care to have a stake in it, to give you the most favourable terms possible. Secondly, I myself am putting in every available penny, and lastly M. Armand and the Baron D'Ormontagne, two of the most honourable men in

all Paris, take each an equal share. By the way, have you met M. Armand?"

"No, I confess I have not seen him for a long time."

"Oh, then you will find him a most charming man, and one who combines great business talent with extreme caution." In fact the testimonials of these two gentlemen were so high that Payot felt it would be almost an insult to call on Armand at all.

Precisely at eight o'clock in the evening the baron, true to his word, and looking even more florid than usual, called again.

"Voila, mon ami, we can now arrange everything. We have taken such a fancy to you, mon brave, that we feel our consciences will not be satisfied until we offer you two hundred shares is our syndicate at the absurdly low figure of 1,000 francs each.

"Two hundred thousand francs (£8,000)," said Payot meditatively, "that is a great deal of money in these days—a great deal of money."

"But consider, mon ami, what you are going to get for it—a large share in the richest mine in the world. Why, in three months when the first dividend is declared, each of your two hundred shares will be worth 50,000 francs, and the first dividend alone will repay you for all you have spent, five times over. Such a chance as this only happens once in a lifetime."

"But if they are so enormously valuable, why do you sell them at all?"

"For a very simple reason, my dear Payot, we are not selling them to you for your money, but for your name. You must remember your name is a thing to conjure with. You are held in such esteem that when the public sees the prospectus with your name on the list of subscribers, there will be an active market at once, and the shares will go to ten or twenty times the present price."

Payot felt extremely flattered and firmly persuaded himself that it was really the case, and that his name could command capital anywhere. After some hesitation he consented to take the shares, and prepared to arrange with his bankers to pay D'Ormontaigne the purchase money.

He was delighted with his bargain, especially as every few

days he received a copy of a cable message showing the increasing returns they were getting.

A meeting of directors was held at which Payot attended. It was passed unanimously that the Company should be floated with a capital of 10,000,000 francs, and the public was invited to take up shares.

"My dear Payot," said the baron, "now is a chance to underwrite. Each of our directors is going to underwrite a million francs, and of course we look to you to do the same. You will receive 250,000 shares as a bonus, and you will never have to pay for a single share. Why, the public will subscribe ten times over. The demand is already so great that the secretary has applied for ten extra clerks."

Payot hesitated and said he would think it over.

The next day the baron brought Armand with him, and the latter simply boiled over with enthusiasm.

"My dear Payot," he exclaimed, shaking his hand vigorously and patting him in a patronising way on the back. "my congratulations, you are a multi-millionaire already. Now you see the wisdom of following the advice of my esteemed friend the baron. Ah, D'Ormontagne is a great financier. Rothschild will have to look to his laurels now, but I am afraid he will have to give up the race. You mark my words, Payot, we shall all be in the Ministry at the next elections. France simply can't get on without us."

Payot sighed and merely shook his head. "I perceive you are an optimist, monsieur, and to be candid with you I confess I dread optimists. They are only a shade better than the pessimists. The latter look only on the dark side of everything, and are so cautious that they are afraid to embark on any enterprise at all, the result being that they never attempt anything unless it is absolutely devoid of any risk whatsoever. But the optimists—believe me, I have had enough of them, goodness only knows—the optimist, I repeat, always counts his chickens before they are hatched. He sees everything through rose-coloured spectacles. He counts on everything going right, and makes no provision for anything going wrong. This fanatic has also a curious way of calculating the number of tons of ore extracted every month which he multiplies by the number of ounces assayed per ton, and sets the total down as the amount

which will be distributed in dividends. The silly fellow overlooks the immense amount of money which has to be sunk in working capital on the mine—in transport, food, tools, machinery, water, motive power and fuel. The condition of the roads, the proximity to a railway, the amount of available horse-power, fuel and water, the absence of any one of which is enough to ruin the prospects of the best mine —are details which never trouble him in the least. Nothing is set aside for reserve, nothing for emergencies, and so his estimate of the profits instead of being, let us say for the sake of argument, £10,000 a month, really works out at £1,000—or a tenth of his estimate when it comes to be divided among the shareholders. In a word, he becomes saturated with megalomania like a general paralytic."

"My dear Payot, you have almost taken the words out of my mouth, so thoroughly do I agree with all that you have just said," replied Armand, "but you are entirely mistaken, if you imagine that I am an optimist. On the contrary, I am so cautious that my friends nickname me the pessimist, a quite inappropriate term, I assure you, since I have the reputation of having the dash and boldness of the great Napoleon. Is that not so, baron?"

The baron had been nodding approval so violently at every word that his friend Armand had been saying, that he had to express his assent by patting him on the back instead.

"My dear Payot," said the baron, "excuse me always addressing you in this way—but your charm of manner has so won my heart that I feel it quite impossible to address you by any other term. If you will be good enough to read the prospectus carefully you will see that everyone of these items is munificently provided for. No detail has been omitted. The sum which our engineer considers ample to meet every possible contingency only amounts to £10,000 a month."

"What!" cried Payot, horrified beyond measure as he jumped up with a bound. "Do you really mean to say that this blessed mine is going to cost us £120,000 a year to keep going? Why, we shall have to close down before we can distribute a sou in dividends. Ma foi, we shall all be ruined in no time."

"Not so fast, my dear sir," they both shouted together, "not so fast. It is quite clear that the magnitude of the undertaking has been too vast to enter your brain. You must digest it gradually, and take in bits at a time, just as a boa constrictor swallows an antelope. Now just follow me very carefully," said the baron, standing up from his chair and waving his hands about like a musical conductor, in order to give greater emphasis to his remarks. "Let me repeat. The expenses all told amount to £10,000 a month. Let us multiply that sum by two to be on the safe side, and we arrive at £20,000 a month."

"Stop, my good fellow, you must be mad," cried Payot excitedly.

"Please reserve your remarks, mon ami, until I have done. When our stamp battery is in full work, the engineer says we shall crush 20,000 tons a month, and taking the lowest estimate of the richness of the ore at 28 ounces per ton—which is far below our average, as you must admit—we shall recover 560,000 ounces of gold a month. Reckon the market price of gold at £4 per ounce, the output of the mine amounts to £2,240,000 a month! Now, to satisfy the doubts of our mutual friend let us suppose the monthly working expenses to come to four times what our engineer considers ample, or £40,000, and still we have two million two hundred thousand golden sovereigns to distribute among the shareholders every month—a fortune amounting to six hundred and sixty million francs a year. I can prove that is absolutely correct," added Armand, bringing his fist down on the table with a thud, and you, mon cher Payot, with your underwriting shares added to those you already possess will enjoy a perpetual income of eighty-eight million francs a year. Only think of it, my dear friend, and ask yourself what will all this wealth have cost you? A paltry £8,000. Why, in a year's time you will be spending more than that in fancy waistcoats and cigars, or tips to your servants."

A few days later the *Petit Journal* appeared with a whole page devoted to the Prospectus of the Company.

The *Journal des Mines* in a scathing article pointed out that the whole thing was a fraud from beginning to end,

and warned the public not to touch a share. It even cast doubts on the very existence of the mine, and called attention to the fact that no railway existed within a hundred miles of it. But the *Mining Journal* is not printed for the general public, who, after all, comprise the vast majority of the subscribers.

Le Soir, *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Temps*, *La Patrie* and all the other dailies contained leading articles on the wonderful richness of the baron's discovery. But although these newspapers made use of it as excellent copy, they one and all ridiculed it as a 'mare's nest,' and pointed out that no such mines ever had been, or ever would be found. Payot had not only taken up the 100 founders' shares of 1,000 francs each in cash which he borrowed on the securities at his bank, and which principally found its way into the pockets of the baron and Norcier, but he had further committed himself by underwriting 40,000 shares at 25 francs each.

As he walked along the boulevard his ears were delighted by the hoarse cries of the newsvendors—"Discovery of a wonderful mine in Mexico," "The New Jerusalem Mine," "Meeting of the Directors," "Complete copy of the Prospectus."

For a few days it was a seven days' wonder.

Payot spent most of the day fingering the paper tape as it poured out of the slit of the machine like a serpent's tongue, and formed endless coils in a large wicker basket beneath it.

At first the shares began to boom.

He fingered the tape with nervous fingers. 25 francs came out in deep blue figures on the tape. Payot watched the tape roll out—French Rentes—Suez Canal shares—Messagerie Maritimes—Consols 79.

Then the machine stopped suddenly of its own accord, and as suddenly started again only to stop once more.

The financier at length saw the welcome news—New Jerusalem 25.50—26 francs—27.50—28—30 francs.

"Hurrah! well done, Jerusalem the Golden"—35 francs—40 francs.

"Ah, that's all right," he said, and the machine stopped again.

He waited a long time, but a fresh quotation failed to appear.

"Never mind, I will go to a first-class restaurant and enjoy a good dinner. 40 francs," he said to himself. "Well, I have nearly doubled my money already. That's good enough business for one day," and so saying he took a taxi and drove off to fetch the baron to dine with him and drink the health of the New Jerusalem Mine, in a bottle of Perrier Jouet.

Early the following morning he took up the tape again. His heart thumped with excitement so much that he could hardly hold the tape steadily enough to read it.

34 francs, it began—35 francs, ah, that's better—40 francs—45 francs—50 francs. Payot actually clapped his hands with excitement, and caused several Agents de Bourse to turn round and look at what had excited him.

"What is amusing you?" he enquired, looking round at a broker who was examining the tape over Payot's shoulder.

"Only your excitement over those stupid Jerusalems."

"What!" enquired Payot, "have you not bought any? I should advise you to do so immediately. They are climbing up fast, and if you wait you will have to pay through the nose for them, I can tell you."

The gentleman to whom Payot spoke so confidently was a delightful man, passionately fond of children, somewhat abrupt to strangers, but very warm-hearted and sympathetic with those he knew. He bore a very remarkable resemblance to Dr. Villebois, with his bald head, clean-shaven face and bushy side-whiskers. He had a bourgeois mien, very talkative and gay, and usually spoke in a loud voice, which is considered so objectionable by the English.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, "I would not touch them with a ten-foot pole. That mine is a fraud. I know it."

"And how does monsieur know it?" enquired Payot, his heart thumping for a very different reason from that which excited it a few moments ago.

"Wait a bit, and monsieur will see. I notice they stand at 50 frs. now, but to-morrow monsieur will find

them drop. Oh yes," he added, as Payot looked flushed and angry at the man's cynical smile, "you will see. Mark my words and you will see them drop to 30 frs. and then to 20 frs.—10 frs.—5 frs.—and then to this," and he made a circle with his forefinger and thumb, and winked his eye with a chuckle.

Payot got very red in the face, and cast a defiant glance at the Agent de Bourse.

"Has monsieur got many?" the broker enquired.

"Yes, I am the proud possessor of a million francs worth."

"Holy Virgin," cried the agent in a mocking tone, "what a fool!"

"Does monsieur wish to insult me then?" cried Payot. "I think I know what I am doing better than he does. I know the mine and I know the promoters."

"I beg monsieur's pardon a thousand times," replied the agent, feeling a little ashamed of himself and assuming a kinder tone, "but I also know the promoters, and if monsieur will take my poor advice, which I give without the least prejudice or self interest, monsieur will sell his shares as quickly as he can. See," he added, as he took up the tape once more, "regardez-la," and the letters spelt out, 'Jerusalems 45 frs.—35 frs.—20 frs.—17 frs. 50 —15 frs.—10 frs.' Payot gazed at them in terror. He shut his eyes and would have fallen but for his friend, the agent, who caught hold of him and steadied him.

"Come with me," he said in a kindly voice, and taking him to the nearest café gave him a glass of brandy.

The brandy revived him and he thanked his friend.

"Now, my dear sir," he replied, "permit me to sell your shares for you."

Payot squeezed his hand. "Merci, monsieur," he replied, "I would gladly do so, but my shares are all underwritten, and I have not received them yet."

The broker whistled. "Diable, what a misfortune!" he exclaimed. "Anyhow, here is my card. Call on me to-morrow at my office, and if I can be of any assistance, you may rely on me."

He looked at the card which bore the name:—

JEAN BEAUPAIRE.

99a, RUE ST. HONORE,
PARIS.

The next day the shares dropped—to nine—and finally to eight francs.

Payot felt so ill he sent for Villebois. The worthy doctor did what he could, but although an admirable physician for bodily ailments, he was almost helpless to cure the mind.

The day after, the shares made a slight recovery. They went to 12 frs. 50, and finished for the day at 15 frs., but the next day they dropped again to 6 frs.—no buyers.

Payot called on M. Beaupaire and implored him to help him.

"Certainly, my dear sir, rely on me. I may save some of the wreckage yet. Anyhow, I will do my best."

The financier squeezed his hand and went back to his house.

A few days later he received a very polite note from the baron in which he called on him to pay for his underwritten shares, and enclosed a polite account.

Payot's eyes swam when he saw the amount, £40,000, which had to be met on the making-up day at the end of the month.

He went to his banker's with a sad heart, and was closeted with him for a couple of hours, ascertaining the market value of his securities. They added up to £36,000 in all. There was nothing left but his house and furniture, and he owed £40,000.

"Sell everything I have at once," he replied, "I am ruined," and he shook hands with the banker and left the bank with a heavy heart.

He walked, for he was afraid to spend the money on a cab, and arrived at Monsieur Beaupaire's house.

How terribly dark the future loomed up before him, what visions floated through his fevered brain. He pondered over the dark days of poverty which faced him in lurid colours. Where was the dot he promised his daughter for her marriage portion? What would she think of him now? How could Delapine marry her when she was without a sou? How could she earn her living except as a despised and pitied governess? He thought of his old comrade Duval—the brave old man in spite of his vanity and eccentricities—now lying cold in the grave. He thought of his son Pierre, a parricide and an outcast like Ishmael of old, a wild man, whose hand was against every man and every man's hand against him, and he trembled at the awful vista it awoke in his mind. He looked out of the windows and saw the carriages pass with the footmen on the box and handsome women inside beautifully dressed, and watched them going to the opera with their lovers or husbands, and he shuddered as he felt that his poverty would cause all men to forsake him, and he would have to face the world alone, uncared-for and despised by all, even his nearest friends. How could he face poverty with its lean fleshless hands and sunken eyes, the single, cold, comfortless room, and the pangs of hunger? He thought of all his friends, wealthy, influential, talented, and how they would turn their heads on one side when he passed by. Oh, how bitter was the world! He thought of the saying he had so often repeated at the festive board—'Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and the world will laugh at you,' and he felt the fearful truth and reality of it at last. "When a man is down, kick him. Yes, that is the way of the world," he said to himself, "ah, yes, it is a cruel, cruel world when the gilding is all brushed off. Alas, the world has no sympathy for the gambler who loses."

He was brooding over his terrible blow when M. Beaupaire entered the room.

"Bon jour, mon ami, I am delighted to see you."

Payot reached out his hand and turned his face aside.

"Console me, my good friend," he said, "I am a ruined man."

"My dear fellow, don't look so glum as that, things are never so bad that they can't be worse. Come along, cheer up, I have promised to stick to you and help you, and I mean to do it. Here, have a glass of wine with me, and we will see what is the best thing to do now."

"It's all up with me, my friend, you can't help me, I am done for."

"Pray don't say that. Everything is for the best."

"Because everything is for the best, it does not follow that everything is for my best," said Payot gloomily.

"My dear sir, don't be down in the dumps. You remember the adage,

> "For every evil under the sun
> There's a remedy or there's none.
> If there is one try and find it,
> If there isn't——never mind it.

Cheer up, old man. Don't you remember the saying of Jean Paul Richter 'Sorrow is often sent for our benefit, just as we darken the cages of the birds in order to teach them to sing.'"

Payot heaved a sigh and said nothing.

"First of all let us sell your shares, mon ami. They have still some sort of a value, and we must begin to glean the field. I will be back in an hour."

M. Beaupaire went into the Bourse and tried to sell the shares. He managed to sell 1,000 at 5 francs, and another 4,000 at 2 frs. 50, but after that there were no offers.

He found Payot looking the image of despair.

"Never mind, I have sold 5,000 shares for 19,000 frs. That is better than nothing anyhow," cried Beaupaire cheerily. "By the way, have you no friends at all who can help you, mon ami?"

"You know what friends are when you have no money."

"Well, well, surely there are some decent ones left?"

"I know the Villebois family, but I don't like to ask assistance of him."

"Don't you know anyone else—come now think?"

"No, I know no one. Stop, there is Professor Delapine.

Perhaps he would not refuse to listen to me because he is engaged to my daughter."

"What? Do you mean Professor Henri Delapine of the Sorbonne?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"My dear fellow, don't lose a minute. He is the very man for you. I know him intimately—an awfully good sort, and clever! Why he is the smartest man in Paris. I'll lay you a wager of any amount you like, that Delapine will pull you through. Shake," he said proffering his hand to Payot who grasped it warmly.

"Thank you with all my heart," said Payot; "we will see him immediately," and M. Beaupaire hailed a taxi, and they drove to the Villebois's.

M. Beaupaire and Payot were soon engaged in earnest conversation with Delapine, who was propped up in an easy-chair with Renée who sat on a footstool beside him.

"You need not leave me, Renée," said the professor, as she was about to retire. "I am sure these gentlemen will not mind, and I know she wants to know the worst, don't you, Renée?"

Delapine listened quietly to the history of the New Jerusalem bubble, and leaning back with his eyes half closed, and with the tips of his fingers pressed together after the manner of divines, but said nothing. When Payot and Beaupaire had quite finished, Delapine looked up with a smile.

"Well," he answered, "I like you to put your confidence in me. You are a man after my own heart, and I promise you I will put you straight again, in fact all my arrangements for doing it have been completed for several days past."

"What do you mean, professor?" the two men called out together.

"Have I not put it clearly then?"

"Yes, but we don't understand you."

"Ah, that is another affair. As a matter of fact I did not intend that you should understand me. But I know everything that has happened since you first met with that arch-rogue, Baron D'Ormontagne, who by the way was a

bookmaker's clerk who got dismissed for swindling, and is no more a baron than you are."

"My God," said Payot, "how did you learn all these things?"

"A little bird told me," said Delapine, smiling. "Now, my dear Payot, all you have to do is to sell everything you have got, and pay off your debts like a man of honour as I know you are. I give you fourteen days to do it in."

"Good," replied Payot, "and then?"

"Then come and see me again."

Renée nodded significantly to Delapine.

"My lady doctor is in command of the ship, and her orders have to be obeyed, and they are that both of you must leave the room at once. Pray do not think that I want to get rid of you, gentlemen, but I have no option in the matter," said Delapine, smiling.

CHAPTER XXI

MARCEL MAKES AN UNEXPECTED ACQUAINTANCE

BEAUPAIRE and Payot had no sooner left the house than they encountered Marcel walking up and down the garden footpath. He was so absorbed in composing aloud a new poem on Christopher Columbus that he was quite unconscious that he was being overheard.

"Dis donc, mon cher Marcel, what is that you are saying about a flock of parrots?"

"It was a remarkable incident in the great navigator's voyage which profoundly affected mankind—but I had no idea that I was declaiming aloud."

"Indeed you were, and we were both remarking what charming verses they were. But tell us what the parrots had to do in the matter?"

"The parrots had everything to do with it. Although it was apparently a mere accident, it changed the history of the world and sealed the fate of nations. The story runs as follows:—Columbus, who had been tossing about for weeks and weeks in the Atlantic searching for the unknown Continent which he believed existed somewhere to the west, at length knew from various indications that he was nearing land, and while he was debating in his mind what would be the best course to pursue, Captain Pinzon, who was in command of the *Pinta*, happened to observe a flock of parrots flying in a south-west direction. Accordingly Columbus altered the course of his vessels, and steered in the direction of the Brazils instead of heading for North America. The result was that the southern continent became Spanish and Catholic, while the northern one afterwards became Anglo-Saxon and Protestant."

"A most remarkable and momentous incident," replied Payot, and one which teaches us what astonishing results may follow from the most trifling causes. By the way, M. Beaupaire, allow me to introduce my esteemed and highly gifted friend Monsieur George Marcel, of whom we have all heard so much lately."

Marcel took off his hat and bowed gracefully.

Monsieur Beaupaire returned the salutation and expressed his unqualified delight in meeting such a distinguished man. He was particularly struck with Marcel's unique appearance and charming manners, and felt that it would be a great opportunity to invite him and Payot to dinner.

"I shall be delighted to accept your kind invitation," said Payot, "and I am sure my distinguished friend will be equally honoured by partaking of your hospitality with me, eh, Marcel?"

The latter shook hands with Monsieur Beaupaire, and said that it would give him immense pleasure.

Payot became so engrossed in listening to his friend Marcel's lively and amusing conversation, that he soon recovered his gaiety, and actually indulged in a joke.

"Ah! M. Payot," said Marcel, who had been listening to the account of Payot's misfortunes, "it does one good to meet a man who can be cheerful after having lost everything. There is nothing like a little sympathy for cheering a man up. Sympathy is the sum of all the virtues."

"You are a man after my own heart, sir," said Beaupaire, patting Marcel on the back, "you have made our friend Payot's face look quite cheerful."

"That's right," said Marcel to Payot, "God loveth the cheerful loser. Yes," he added, putting his hand on Payot's shoulder and looking up into his face,

"Smile
Awhile,
And while you smile
Others smile,
And soon there's miles and miles
Of smiles,
And life's worth while
Because you smile."

Payot's face lit up and he actually beamed with inward hope, as the world suddenly seemed to him to grow brighter and more beautiful. "Where did you get that from, Marcel?" said Payot, smiling.

"You don't suppose I am going to give away the source of all my jokes to you?"

Beaupaire looked at Payot and they both laughed.

As they entered Beaupaire's drawing-room he introduced his guests to Madame Beaupaire, who rose at once and welcomed them effusively, with both hands outstretched.

"Allow me, gentlemen, to introduce you to my daughter Violette."

Marcel and Payot bowed and shook hands. Marcel, who was of a very impressionable nature, became visibly affected by her beauty and striking personality.

Violette was an uncommon specimen of her race. Born of a French father and Spanish mother, she was at the same time an enigma to her acquaintances and a revelation to strangers. Her hair was long and black with that peculiar bluish lustre of a raven's wing. Her face was of ivory whiteness, regular in outline, with a finely chiselled nose, which grew out of her face like that of a Greek goddess, and just tipped in a most provoking manner to render the nostrils visible, while her lips were firm and rosy and delicately curved like cupid's bow. Moreover, her brilliant eyes which, like her features, were constantly on the move, gave her that charm of expression which is at once so fascinating and dangerous to the other sex. At one moment she was sweetness itself and polite to a degree, and then suddenly, without warning, her mischievous smile would change into a look of scorn or disapproval, which would completely upset all the calculations of her companions as to her real feelings. Highly gifted herself, she delighted in nothing better than a passage-of-arms with a man whom she felt to be her superior, but was herself loth to admit it.

"Have you lived a long time in Paris, mademoiselle?" enquired Marcel, when they had sat down to dinner.

"Oh, yes, we have been here for some years now, but Paris is not my birth-place you know," she answered with a smile.

"And what town, may I ask, has been so fortunate as to claim mademoiselle as a citizen?"

"Buenos Aires, monsieur," she replied in a soft, musical voice, and darting a quick glance at Marcel, and then lowering her eyelashes in a way that sent a thrill of emotion down to his very boots.

"Ah! a most delightful place. I was there some years ago," said Marcel. "Yes, I can still picture it in my mind, I remember it so well. I shall never forget the charming Avenida Alvear, and the Plaza 25 de Mayo overlooking the classical portico of the cathedral. What a lovely cathedral it is to be sure. It always reminds me of "La Madeleine," with its twelve stately Corinthian columns and its exquisitely carved pediment."

"How delightful to meet a gentleman who is so familiar with my dear old birthplace," said Violette. "I feel we are quite old friends already."

Marcel chuckled inwardly with satisfaction. "That chess opening of the pawn to King's four followed by the Knight to Bishop three has begun the game well," he thought to himself. "I could not very well appear ignorant of a town which gave birth to so charming a creature."

"What were you doing there, if it is not a rude question?" Violette enquired, warming up with her subject.

"H'm, you see my father had the good fortune to be a man of means, and although I was educated at the university, I employed my time in cultivating the arts of poetry and music."

"Oh! how delightful, we must invite you to play for us. We have an amateur concert here every Sunday evening. I will ask mama to invite you. What instrument do you play?"

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, but I am—ahem—afraid you misunderstood me," he answered, feeling that he was treading on dangerous ground already. "I am not a musician, I am—ahem—I sing."

"Oh! that's still better. There are so many good musicians now-a-days, but so few really good singers. I feel certain you have a good voice. You will promise me to come and sing, won't you?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, you flatter me. Unfortunately I am under the doctor's orders just now for a slight inflammation of the throat, and I am strictly forbidden to sing. It is a terrible trial for one who has such a passion for harmony."

"A terrible trial I am sure," replied Violette, watching his face closely. "Has monsieur endured this calamity for long?"

"Yes, ahem—for some considerable time now. But to return to Buenos Aires."

"Haven't you finished with that place yet? Gracious, I thought you had left some time ago."

Marcel looked at her to try and fathom her meaning.

"By the way, monsieur, where did you live in Buenos Aires?" she said a little suspiciously.

"Oh, I used to spend most of my time riding up and down the Parque 3 de Febrero in Palermo."

"Oh, yes, how well I remember it. I have often driven through that beautiful park. I think Palermo the most beautiful spot in the world."

"Ah, there I am with you, mademoiselle--especially if I knew that you were living there."

Violette laughed, and her eyes twinkled with roguish fun as she tapped him on the knuckles with her fan. "Oh, you men, what flatterers you all are."

"And where did you live, mademoiselle, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I? Oh, I lived in the Calle Florida, next to a magnificent building," and her eyes twinkled with mischief.

"What a strange coincidence. Why, I lived just on the other side of it."

Monsieur Beaupaire who happened to be listening burst out into a loud laugh.

"Sapristi! but that's too funny for words," he exclaimed.

Marcel looked round and saw Violette in fits of laughter as well.

"Checkmated, by Jove," thought Marcel. "I wonder how I put my foot in it," he muttered unconsciously half aloud. But the quick hearing of Violette caught the muttered exclamation.

"Why, that building is the town jaol," she said laughing.

"Good Lord, deliver us," exclaimed Marcel, trying to conceal his vexation.

"Monsieur, I don't believe you have ever been to Buenos Aires. Now confess."

"If Mademoiselle will forgive me, I own up to it."

"We will forgive you this time," she said, tapping him once more with her fan.

"A penny for your thoughts?" he next enquired.

"To speak plainly, I think you are just a pure romancer," she answered, looking very cross and frowning. "I gave you credit for more ability than you seem to possess," and she turned her head away from him. Marcel felt very angry and nettled at her outspoken criticism, and felt inclined to show her his annoyance, but he allowed his discretion to overcome his feelings.

"Ah, mademoiselle, you forget—

> "The naked truth and the naked lie
> Are banned in good society.

"What do you like best among the arts?" added Marcel, anxious to change the conversation.

"Oh, I adore music," she replied, turning towards him and becoming more amiable, "and I love painting, but I think I enjoy reading best."

"What? Novels?"

"Oh, dear no, poetry and the literature of the great writers. By the way, I think you said you had taken to writing poetry?" she said sarcastically.

"That is true, mademoiselle."

Violette looked at him incredulously, and bit her lip with a frown.

"I can vouch for the truth of that, mademoiselle," said Payot who had been talking to her father and was now listening to Violette. "I assure you I know nothing superior to our friend's poetry. It combines the sparkle and wit of Alfred de Musset with the intense pathos of Victor Hugo, and is not inferior to either."

"What!" cried Violette, "you don't mean to say that I

am actually talking to George Marcel who wrote the book on epigrams, '*Les poemes de ma Jeunesse*,' and '*Le dernier combat dans le Colisée*'?"

"That is the same gentleman, mademoiselle. There is only one George Marcel in the world as far as I know."

The change which took place in Violette's features was almost ludicrous. She had been under the impression that he was merely an ignorant and very conceited fop, who was only pretending that he had travelled, and was posing as a poet and author of merit, when she suddenly discovered that she had been snubbing one of the most promising poets and writers in France.

Marcel watched the struggle going on in her mind, and noted her confusion and blushes with an amused expression.

"Since I am unable to play and sing to Mademoiselle, may I perhaps have the great pleasure of hearing her play and sing to me?"

Violette blushed again and looked up at her mother who fortunately took up the cue.

"Certainly, monsieur," said Madame Beaupaire, "we shall expect you on Sunday evening next, if you will take pot-luck with us, and we shall then be better prepared for the concert afterwards."

"Queen protects the Knight," said Marcel still with the game of chess in his mind, "but renders herself open to attack," thought Marcel to himself. "By Jove, I may win the game yet. She plays well and hits hard, but I like Violette all the more for that."

"You will be sure and come, won't you?" the young lady asked in a half whisper as she lit a cigarette when the coffee had been served, and looked up in his face with a roguish smile.

Marcel felt he could have worshipped her. He so far lost himself as to squeeze her hand, thinking that he had made sufficient progress to warrant it, but Violette gently removed her hand with a look of displeasure. He felt he had made a false move, but resolved to turn it to his advantage by saying in a low voice which he knew would only reach her :—

"Cinco sentidos tenemos
Y los cinco necesitamos
Y los cinco nos perdemos
Quando nos enamoramos."*

To his unbounded delight she replied:—

Love is strong, but love is blind,
No faults can we discover;
It is the heart and not the mind,
We look for in a lover.

He stayed just long enough for the host and hostess to rise, and then with immense self-content and tact nudged Payot to accompany him, and bidding them all good-night departed for the Villebois's house dreaming of the delight at crossing swords with her at the forthcoming Sunday's dinner, and feeling that he was already hopelessly in love with her.

Punctually fourteen days later, Payot and Beaupaire were ushered into the library where Delapine was sitting in an easy-chair revising an essay which he was preparing for the Academie des Sciences.

On the entrance of his visitors the professor rose to welcome them.

"Delighted to meet you, gentlemen," he said, extending his hand with a frank smile. "I suppose you have come in obedience to my request?"

Payot nodded.

"I hope," continued Delapine, "you have sold your property and shares to the best advantage, and realized enough money to pay off your liabilities?"

"Every one of them," said Payot.

"I can vouch for that," said Beaupaire, "as my friend Payot gave me a power of attorney to act for him, since he was too unnerved to rely on his own judgment."

"Excellent," said Delapine, stroking his chin and glancing

* In our heads five senses dwell,
In many ways we use them,
But when we love a maiden well
Alas! we quickly lose them.

from one to the other with his piercing eyes. Have you anything left?"

"Alas! monsieur, only forty thousand francs."

"Well, that is better than nothing anyhow. You must be thankful for small mercies. I suppose you have still kept the house?"

"Well, not exactly. I was obliged to mortgage it, and managed with the money I raised to sell everything, and have a few thousand francs over."

"Never mind, however great a misfortune may be, you may always be sure it might have been much worse. Forty thousand francs is at least something to fall back upon."

"That is true, but I shall not be able to afford any dot for Renée."

"I will see to that."

"What! You, professor? How can you provide a dot out of your slender income?"

"I never said I was going to find my fiancée's dowry out of my income, nor do I intend to borrow it."

"Then how will you find the money?"

"You need not have any anxiety on that score, the moment the money is wanted the money will be here."

"So you have the money ready?"

"Not a sou."

"And you intend to get it almost immediately?"

"Yes, within a week."

"But how? Do tell us," they both exclaimed.

"I make it a rule of my life never to discuss anything I intend to do until it is accomplished."

"But, my dear professor, you might at least give us some outline of the method you intend to employ, especially as we are such good friends, and besides we might be able to help you."

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked them.

"Of course we can," they replied, eager to get the news.

"So can I," he replied with a merry chuckle, and one of his beaming smiles.

"What an extraordinary man," said Beaupaire.

"Now, listen," said the professor. "I have already had a talk with Dr. and Madame Villebois and with our friends

Marcel and Riche, and they have all agreed to my plan to take the train on Monday night to Beaulieu, which is the next station to Monaco, and I trust that both of you gentlemen will be able to accompany us."

Payot rubbed his hands with excitement and they both eagerly assented.

"Why is he going to Beaulieu of all places in the world?" Payot asked himself, "I wonder whether it has anything to do with his promise to restore my fortune? He can't surely be insane enough to imagine that he can recover the money by gambling at Monte Carlo. The professor is certainly eccentric, but I credit him with more common-sense than to do that. However, we shall see."

"You must both of you pack up and get ready," said Delapine. "I shall be away seven days from this evening, and we shall start for Beaulieu the day after to-morrow by the nine o'clock Rapide de Nuit from the Gare de Lyon. We shall meet at the ticket office at a quarter-past eight. C'est entendue?"

"Bien—but is that all you intend to tell us?" said Payot, somewhat surprised at his imperious tone.

"Have I not said enough?"

"Yes—but—"

"But you must excuse me, gentlemen, as I have still a great deal of work to do before I can leave. I shall expect you the day after to-morrow, good-bye till then," and he waved them off with one of his choicest smiles.

Wednesday night saw the whole of the party assembled soon after eight o'clock near the ticket office of the Gare de Lyon. Delapine had reserved a coupé for each of the Villebois and Beaupaire families together with Monsieur Payot, so that Marcel and Riche had to shift for themselves.

"I say, Marcel," said Riche, "who is that charming young lady I saw you chatting with just now?"

"Whom do you refer to?"

"Why that girl over there between Madame Villebois and the professor."

"Oh! don't you know her? Mademoiselle Violette Beaupaire," he replied in a half whisper lest the party

referred to should overhear him, "she is the daughter of M. Beaupaire the stock broker, who is running about after the luggage, she's a ripping girl, I assure you, and no mistake."

"Voilette Beaupaire," said Riche half aloud to himself, "I know that name somehow. Where was it I heard it?" and he tapped his forehead in thought. "Oh! yes, I remember now, she was the girl with the wonderful ring I met that day at the café near the Ecolle de Medicine. How small the world is to be sure."

"Why! You don't mean to say that you know her?" said Marcel, who had caught the drift of what he had been saying half aloud to himself. "Where did you meet her?" he added with a tinge of jealousy in his voice.

The doctor related the curious adventure he had had at the café, and the marvellous predictions of Violette which she had made while gazing at the ring.

"Have you never seen her since?" enquired Marcel with a tone of anxiety in his voice.

"Never my boy, until this very day, I give you my word; but," he added, "I have been hunting all over Paris to try and find her ever since that afternoon. I would have given a good deal to have had her address."

"Why! are you in love with her then?" asked Marcel as he scrutinized his friend's face while waiting for the reply, but could detect nothing in his face, not even a muscle moved.

"Lord bless you, no," replied the doctor, "but she is the most interesting girl I have ever met in all my life, and I have been simply dying to test her extraordinary powers again with her ring."

"Thank God for small mercies," thought Marcel to himself, as he assured himself that he was no rival of his, "However it is just as well that he and I will be travelling in another part of the train out of the reach of temptation."

The departure of the Rapide de Nuit from the Gare de Lyon is one of the greatest events of the day. The great glass-roofed station is filled with fog, and vibrates with the shrill whistles of innumerable engines which

perpetually come and go apparently without rhyme or reason. At all times the din is ear-splitting, but from half past eight p.m. onwards, the noise increases tenfold. The station gets more and more packed with people. Here one may notice a company of tired and sunburnt soldiers marching up the platform in their blue coats and red baggy trousers covered with black leather below the knee, each carrying a painfully heavy knapsack and rifle; while hurrying along may be seen gay-coloured Turcos, Arabs with their red fezzes, or crowds of peasants patiently waiting for the omnibus train, which leaves an hour later than the express. The waiting rooms are crowded with tourists, English, French, Germans, and Americans.

What a babel! But see, there are more outside hurrying about hither and thither in wild confusion, demanding of every official they meet what time the train leaves and where they can find it, notwithstanding the fact that they have been told a score of times already. Interpreters, Cook's men, Gaze's men, and couriers are bustling about collecting their flocks together. Porters with trolleys and hand-barrows piled up with luggage are to be seen hauling and shoving and struggling to push their way through the impenetrable forest of human beings. To the casual observer calmly surveying the scene, the entire place seems to be a hopeless muddle in which reigns a veritable pandemonium. More and more people enter the train, until it seems incapable of being moved at all, while the huge filthy-looking black engine, so different from the brilliantly painted and exquisitely kept British ones, is belching forth a torrent of black smoke, and blowing off steam with such violence and din as to render all conversation impossible. Here one may see a regular procession of boxes, rugs, and bags all waiting to be weighed, while a file of fifty people or more are standing at the guichet awaiting the delivery of their luggage checks.

The train was crowded to suffocation, and but for Delapine's foresight our friends could not have obtained seats. As it was, Marcel and Riche were pushed into a compartment already nearly full, much to the disgust and annoyance of the passengers who were arranging their rugs for a comfortable sleep during the night.

"That is not good enough for me," said Riche, "I'll bet you a five-franc piece we will get a compartment all to ourselves."

"Done," said Marcel, "but you are bound to lose it, my boy."

"Not a bit of it, you watch me."

"Guard," Riche shouted as the bell rang and the doors were being shut, "this is a smoking compartment and we greatly object to smoking."

Marcel looked at Riche and gave a low whistle.

"Can't be helped," said the guard, "we're just off."

"Excuse me," said Riche in a commanding voice, "I am Monsieur Faure of the Engineering Department, and I must call your attention to Section XIII. Paragraph 79 of the byelaws of the Administration."

"I don't know your name, sir."

"Silence, sir, when I speak. I have only recently been appointed assistant to M. Demange, the chief engineer."

The guard looked him up and down, and scanned his face critically to see if he were joking, but Riche never moved a muscle.

"But, monsieur," said the guard, apologizing profusely, "it is impossible, the train is due to start," and he shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in despair.

"Remember that you are speaking to a high official on the Railway," replied Riche, looking severely at him. "Now you know who I am, look sharp, or I shall be obliged to report you."

The guard grumbled, and discussed the matter with several officials. Almost immediately afterwards Riche and Marcel saw him walk rapidly away. Slowly the huge train steamed out of the station, and various shunting movements took place until at length, after ten minutes delay, a brand-new first-class carriage was attached to the rear of the train.

"Now get in, gentlemen, quickly," said the guard somewhat testily as he blew the whistle.

The moment they were seated, Riche pulled out of his pocket a silver-mounted cigar case and handed Marcel a fine Hanava cigar, at the same time selecting one for himself. As the train rolled out of the station the guard saw

to his horror two blue clouds of smoke rolling out of the window of the compartment.

"Sacr—r—re bleu?" hissed the guard as he held up his hands and shook his fists at the sham officials as they disappeared in the distance, while Riche and Marcel waved their handkerchiefs at the frantic guard as a parting shot.

"By Jove, you know how to travel," said Marcel as he handed Riche a five franc-piece.

"Now for a cosy nap," said Riche, and making a comfortable bed by a skilful arrangement of the seats, he wrapped himself in his rug, put his ticket in the flap of his cap, and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

VIOLETTE NURSES HER FATHER WITH ALARMING RESULTS

THE comfort of a long railway journey is largely dependent on the number of people travelling in the compartment. Two is the ideal number, as one person can lie outstretched on each side. Two is company but three is none, and is nearly as bad as four, in fact it verges on misery for two out of the three, but five makes comfort impossible.

Such was the state of things in Monsieur Beaupaire's coupé. Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle Beaupaire were congratulating themselves on travelling undisturbed, when a couple of English tourists clambered in—or rather were pushed in just as the train was moving, in spite of the protests and remonstrances of the Beaupaires.

The compartment became unbearably stuffy, all the windows being, as is usual on the Continent, hermetically sealed.

It is the wonder of all Englishmen that 'Foreigners' insist on travelling with all openings for ventilation persistently closed, and equally incomprehensible to the foreigner how Englishmen can travel with the windows open, and not catch their death of cold.

"Phew! this is awfully stuffy," exclaimed the elder of the two Englishmen who answered to the name of Ridgeway, "I can't imagine why these foreigners always insist on having the windows closed. There's not a breath of air in the place, Charley," he said to the younger of the two, "do open the windows, there's a good chap." The young man got up and tugged at the strap at the window—it gave way and he fell backwards on to the feet of the passengers.

"Sorry," he said as he picked himself up, and he proceeded to open the opposite window.

Madame Beaupaire looked daggers at him, and she rubbed the foot on which he had fallen.

Charley suddenly uttered a cry of pain. In attempting to open the second window, the frame had slipped and jammed his finger.

"Confound these carriages," said Charley, "why can't someone invent a fool-proof window which will be provided with a strap that will not come off, and that can be opened without reducing one's fingers to pulp?"

Violette laughed at the wry face he made.

Charley turned round, and seeing her good-looking face lit up with merriment, laughed in concert.

"Well, that's a funny way to introduce yourself," said Violette in good English, but with rather a pretty foreign accent.

Violette evidently had the gift of humour, and Charley fell in with it at once.

"I hope Mademoiselle does not mind the window being open," he said.

"Not in the least as far as I am concerned," she replied. "I only hope papa and mamma will not catch cold."

"Oh, there's no fear of that. May I ask if you are going to Monte Carlo to play?"

"We are going there, certainly, but I don't think we are going to play at the Casino, if that's what you mean."

"Well, we are going there, and you bet we are going to have a shy at the tables."

Violette wondered what the expression could mean.

"How do you shy at the tables?" she asked.

"Surely you know what 'shy' means?" he said.

"Of course I do," she replied, nettled to think he imagined she didn't know English. "I know," she continued, "a girl is shy when she hangs down her head and blushes and simpers when a gentleman speaks to her, but I cannot see how one can shy at the tables at Monte Carlo—unless the crowd is so great that it makes one nervous," she added reflectively.

"Oh," said Charley, who was warming up and becoming very communicative, "shy is one of our wonderful English words, like 'box,' and 'shot' and 'go' and 'make.' They may mean anything and everything."

"But, monsieur, how is one to know what a word means if it may imply anything and everything?"

"That's the beauty of our language. It's a perfect joy. It's so tremendously expressive. If you can't get at the meaning by the context you have to guess it by the tone of the voice, as one does when speaking Chinese. Thus, if you were to say to me '*You're* a nice young man,' it would mean that I was *not* a nice young man. Whereas if you were to say 'you *are* a nice young man' you imply the exact opposite, namely that I *am* nice."

"Are you fishing for compliments?" asked Violette, laughing.

"Not exactly, but I feel sure you will say that my last illustration was correct in every respect."

"Oh, you men, you are as vain as peacocks, you think that every girl you meet must at once fall over head and ears in love with you."

"And is not that a very delightful frame of mind to be in?" asked Charley, wondering what she would say next.

Violette laughed heartily at the Englishman's egotism.

"But I assure you, mademoiselle, these little Anglo-Saxon words would fill a dictionary with their shades of meaning. To take an example: the word 'go' has at least a hundred different meanings. Thus we say, 'the clock is going,' whereas it is standing still all the time. 'Go' may mean 'to die,' as in the phrase (he is going)—to succeed (the scheme did not go)—to fare (how goes it?)—to release (let go my hand)—it may mean a misfortune (here's a pretty go)—or an attempt (let's have a go at it)—or——"

"Please, that's enough," cried Violette, "my poor head is in a whirl already. Let us conclude the whole matter by saying that with a dozen of these elastic Anglo-Saxon words of yours one may write a book and express every sentence in Macaulay, Milton and Shakespeare."

"What a pretty wit," said Ridgeway, laughing. "The remarkable thing about the English language," he added, "is that all the words which we use most are not to be found in any dictionary."

Violette opened her eyes in amazement.

"It's a fact, I assure you, mademoiselle."

"What a dreadful language," she replied, "I had no idea English was so difficult. How on earth is the ordinary person to learn it?"

"One does not learn it," said Charley, "it just grows on one. If you try to learn English you never will. The professors of English who are paid to teach you don't know the words themselves, that is, the really useful ones, such as, 'awful,' 'jolly,' 'ripping,' 'rot,' 'blooming,' and thousands of others, and even in the very best French dictionaries you will find the English equivalent which is given, as something which has not the remotest connection with the word you have looked up."

"Surely you are joking, monsieur," she replied.

"Not in the least I assure you," he answered. "I see you have a Gasc's pocket dictionary, mademoiselle, which is one of the very best. Do me the favour to turn up the word 'cad.'"

Violette did so and read out, "cad—conducteur d' omnibus."

"There you are," he replied, "what did I tell you? Suppose an unfortunate and harmless Frenchman arriving for the first time in London, were to rely on the dictionary and address the conductor of the first 'bus he entered as a cad, by George, he would probably find himself the next moment rolling in the gutter with the conductor on the top of him, and his only excuse would be that he trusted to the dictionary."

Violette looked at him with a mingled expression of amazement and doubt as to whether he was serious or not, and then glanced at her father who was snoring in the corner of the carriage, with a night-cap tied over his ears, while Madame Beaupaire was taking stock of Charley by the aid of a gold-mounted pair of lorgnettes attached to a long tortoise-shell handle.

"Evidently you zink ze English language ees vastly superior to ours, monsieur," said madame, who had spent a summer in England, and picked up enough English to understand the drift of what he had been saying.

"Well, to be candid I do. Just think of its range. Our new dictionary contains a million and a half of words, whereas your language has only——"

"Oh, come on, Charley, don't pull her leg," said Ridgeway.

"Sir!" said madame, sitting bolt upright, and surveying him through her hand magnifiers, "you insult me."

"A thousand pardons, madame. What I said was only a colloquial expression for pulling the long bow."

"Pulling ze vot?" she enquired somewhat suspiciously.

"Pulling the long bow—another colloquial expression much employed by Englishmen. It merely implied a caution to my young friend not to exaggerate so much. I assure you, my dear madame, the remark I uttered had no reference whatever to your legs."

"My vot, sir? I think you are egstremely rude."

"Pray forgive me, madame, I crave your indulgence. May I substitute for the word 'legs,' 'inferior extremities,' or lower limbs?"

Madame got very wrath and turned herself half round, and looked out of the opposite window. Beaupaire had just woken up, and catching the last sentence burst out into a hearty laugh, which had the effect of making his better half still more angry.

"How can you be so cruel as to laugh at me, Jean," she said to her husband, "when you see me insulted like this? Have you no feelings left?"

"Pray calm yourself, my dear. Our friend has not the slightest intention of insulting you. I know the expression well, it is perfectly 'en regle.'"

Madame tossed her head as much as to say "I don't believe you a bit." "Besides," she added, "it is not your place to instruct me in English, and I"—with rising voice—"I vill not sit here quietly vile those impudent Englishmen are insulting me and my daughter."

Beaupaire looked at Ridgeway, and gave a wink and a little chuckle half to himself.

"Don't mind her," he whispered to Ridgeway, as he offered him a cigarette, "the old lady is first rate when you get to know her, but she is a great stickler for etiquette—Spanish, you know—very proud—sixteen quarterings—father a Don—seventh cousin of the King of Spain—and all that sort of thing."

Ridgeway nodded.

"Ha! ha!" continued Beaupaire, laughing, "what you were just saying to madame reminds me of an anecdote of Philip the Second of Spain. It is said that when his first wife was coming to Madrid to be married to him she was met at the frontier by an escort of grandees, and was treated with all the stiff ceremonies of the Spanish Court. The lady had occasion to mention her legs during the conversation, and was at once rebuked by the Grand Chamberlain appointed to wait on her. 'Madame,' he said, 'the Queen of Spain is not permitted to have any legs.' On hearing this the good dame burst into tears, thinking it would be necessary to have them amputated. However, the Grand Chamberlain explained to her with profound genuflexions and much bowing, that it was highly impolite even to suggest that so exalted a personage as her prospective Majesty could possibly possess such parts of her anatomy. When this story was related to the King, it is said to have been the only occasion when that fanatical and gloomy monarch was ever seen to laugh."

Mr. Ridgeway was interrupted by the sudden noise of the brakes—z . . z . . z . . z . . z . . Z . . Z . . Z . . sh . . sh . . sH . . sH . . SH . . H . . H . . H . . H.

The train pulled up in the station just two hours after leaving Paris.

"La Roche," shouted the guard. "Cinque minutes d'arrêt."

It was the first stop. Marcel was snoring vigorously notwithstanding the noise.

Riche woke up with the sudden cessation of movement and the noise of the brakes against the wheels. He sat up and rubbed his eyes with his knuckles.

The door opened, and a man with his buxom wife and two children began climbing into the compartment.

"Sh—h," said Riche stepping up to the door and putting his fingers to his lips. "You can't come in, my friend down here has just had a fit. He is subject to sudden outbursts of madness, and might kill you at any moment."

Marcel had just awoke and managed to catch the last sentence of his friend. A quiet smile flitted across his lips, and he closed his eyes again.

The parents exchanged glances as the guard was pushing them in.

"Be quick and get in," said the guard.

"Mais, monsieur, we dare not. This gentleman says his friend is lying down in a fit, and he is quite mad."

The guard hesitated for a moment, and was about to go and call the station master, when Dr. Riche handed him his card. It bore the inscription :—

DOCTEUR RICHE.

CHIRURGIEN A L'HOPITAL,
ALGER.

engraved in bold letters. The card decided matters at once, and the guard pushing the family away, closed the door and locked it at the doctor's request.

"Riche," said Marcel the moment the guard had left, "you are a brick. We can now sleep undisturbed until we get to Marseilles."

The next morning they arrived at Marseilles, and everybody got out to stretch their legs and enjoy a good cup of café au lait at the buffet.

The party had a refreshing wash and brush up to enable them to enjoy the delightful sea views of the Côte d'Azur.

It was the early part of the afternoon when the train pulled up at Beaulieu. They drove to the Hotel des Anglais, somewhat tired but in the best of spirits.

The feelings of Céleste and Renée on seeing the Côte d'Azur for the first time cannot be described. The balmy air was filled with the delicious perfumes of a million flowers and fields of new-mown hay. They saw the deep blue sky paling to a delicate turquoise where it touched the sea at the horizon. They saw the water scintillating

with the sunlight, and its placid surface broken by the white crests of the countless waves. What delighted them most was the exquisite blending of colours, the variations of light and shade, and the luxuriance and wonderful variety of the foliage. Here they saw the loveliest forms of tropical foliage side by side with the more familiar but not less beautiful trees of central and northern Europe. The flowers of the whole world seemed to contribute to the enchanting loveliness of the scene. They saw dense forests of fragrant pine trees, woodland footpaths lined with the sweet alyssum, resembling drifts of scented snow, while the thyme and rosemary formed fragrant patches over the stony sides of the mountains. Higher up the slopes luxuriant groves of pistacia lentiscus or mastic trees could be seen, and bushes of the members of the quassia family, such as the cneorum tricoccum, with its curious triple clusters of berries. In the distance rose the beautiful Mount Boron crowned with the Fort of Montalban, and its slopes covered with tall cistus trees. Dotted here and there were charming villas with delightful gardens, intoxicating the senses with the perfume of lemon and orange. Occasionally the carouba tree could be seen with its wonderful locust-bean pods credited with being the staple food of John the Baptist.

Scattered up and down were olive trees, hoary with age, their trunks knotted and gnarled and twisted like the limbs of caliban. Quite close to Beaulieu they saw sheltered footpaths with hedges on either side lined with roses and geraniums. To the west was the Bay of Villefranche with small gunboats and yachts rocking placidly in the harbour.

"Surely," said the professor, "these must be the gardens of Alcinous with their perpetual summer hemmed in by the mighty salient battlements which form the vanguard of the Alpine chain."

As the members of the party were retiring for the night, Monsieur Beaupaire, who had caught a slight chill on the chest, in spite of what Charley had told him the day before, developed a fit of uncontrollable coughing accompanied with a feeling of oppression on the chest. Dr. Villebois immediately offered his services, which were accepted with

gratitude. He prescribed a cough mixture, and ordered a mustard plaster to be applied for five minutes over the whole of the chest.

"Doctor," said Violette, putting her arms in a coaxing way on his shoulders, "may I prepare the plaster myself, as I have done it many times before, and I know so well how to do it."

"Certainly," said Villebois, "nobody could do it better, get it by all means, and put it on as soon as your father is comfortably settled in bed."

Violette, as soon as she had obtained the ingredients, set to work to prepare the plaster. It was quite late by this time, and the messenger had great difficulty in finding a chemist's shop open, to have the medicine made up.

Violette loved nursing and felt a keen pleasure in doctoring her father. She acted on the principle that if one dose will do a certain amount of good, two doses ought to do twice the benefit, and accordingly she spread a very liberal amount of mustard on the linen. When all was ready she went upstairs to his bedroom, but by this time all the lights were turned off, and she crept cautiously along the passage to his room. She opened the door, and a faint light just enabled her to see where her father was sleeping. He was snoring away apparently in a delightful dream, and Violette, unwilling to awake him, did not turn up the light. So in the semi-darkness she tenderly laid bare his chest, and carefully spread the plaster over the surface. The sufferer uttered a groan, but did not wake. Violette wrapped him up snugly and bent down and gave her father a kiss on his forehead, when the light becoming suddenly brighter, she perceived to her horror that it was not her father at all, but Marcel. Terrified at her mistake she gave a little scream, and ran out of the room, the perspiration streaming from her forehead.

"Oh! dear, oh! dear," she exclaimed, "whatever shall I do? Here I have gone into Marcel's room, and kissed him on the forehead and put a huge mustard plaster on his chest, and now I dare not take it off again for fear of waking him up. Oh! what will become of me?" Violette was in despair. Heartily wishing the ground would open and swallow her up, she walked up and down the passage

wringing her hands in an agony of mind, and wondering what the end of it all would be. At length Violette went to her bedroom, and falling on her knees burst into a flood of tears. But her tears were soon over as the absurdity of the situation dawned on her. A few minutes later she undressed and was soon in the arms of Morpheus, quite oblivious of the mischief she was creating. Violette had not been in bed more than half an hour when she was awakened by hearing the most appalling noise. Somebody was shouting at the top of his voice, "Help! Help! Murder! Fire! Thieves!" Hastily putting on her slippers and dressing-gown, she ran into the passage. By this time the entire establishment was aroused, and men and women attired in all sorts of costumes came hurrying up the stairs to see what all the row was about. Mine host flew to the fire alarm and rang up the fire brigade without waiting to ascertain the real cause of the mischief. At the same time the portier telephoned to the police. The hubbub and confusion increased every moment. Waiters flew wildly up and down stairs, each one asking his neighbour what all the noise was about.

A few minutes later a fire engine came dashing up and half a dozen firemen with their hatchets and brass helmets ran up the stairs followed by three or four gendarmes in uniform. The proprietor ran towards them with his arms outstretched gesticulting wildly. Violette, who was standing in front of her door, looked up and saw the gentleman who was the author of all the scene rush past her clad in pajamas with an embroidered cap ornamented with a gold tassel, and almost flinging himself into the arms of the landlord. "Voila!" he shouted, "see what some miscreant has done to me," and he laid bare his chest all blazing red and fearfully inflamed with the mustard, while he shook the offending plaster in monsieur's face. Violette caught sight of his face. Oh, horror, it was Marcel sure enough, his eyes gleaming, his face flushed, and shouting with a voice almost inarticulate with rage and pain.

"If I can only lay my hands on the scoundrel who has done it, I will flay him alive no matter who he may be."

Violette turned scarlet and looked away for fear he should see her. She hurried back to her bedroom and sank down on the sofa, asking herself how she ever dare face him again, and wondering whether he would ever forgive her if he found her out. What added to her misery was that she felt in her heart she really cared for him. At length a feeling of weariness overcame her, and crawling into bed she soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT BEAULIEU

"The sun upon the calmest sea
Appears not half so bright as thee."

THE next morning Madame Villebois, whose slumbers had been disturbed by the excitement and noise during the night, and who loved ease, was having her chocolate in bed, and studying the menu which the maid had brought up for her special benefit.

"Marie," she said, as her maid propped her back up against the pillows, "you are to be sure to make friends with the chef and bring me a copy of the menus for lunch and dinner as soon as they are printed, and, Marie, fetch me my portemonnaie. See, give him this and tell him to allow you to see how the entrées are prepared, and don't forget the sauces—especially the sauces, do you understand? Oh, I forgot—yes—find out whether he wraps the red mullet in paper soaked in olive oil or butter, be sure and ask him this, as it is most important, and don't forget also to find out how he prepares his gigot à la Mailly, and his poulets à la Villeroy. Do you think, Marie, that he will tell you all this for a small pourboire?"

"Please, madame, I have seen him already and he is a most charming gentleman. He has such a sweet smile and such lovely whiskers. I think if you will leave him to me, madame, I will find out all you want. You know I have my little ways with gentlemen."

"Marie, what do you mean? How dare you take liberties with men? And with cooks of all people! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I shall have to give you notice."

"Oh, but, madame, if you only saw him. He is such a nice gentleman, he patted me under the chin and gave me a kiss on my lips."

Madame gave a start that nearly threw her out of bed, and stared at her as if she were some new animal at the Zoo.

"Marie, Marie, leave the room this minute. I shall tell my husband the moment I get back to Paris, and he will dismiss you at once when he hears it. Oh, dear, what shall I do? To think you have disgraced the family in this way. I would dismiss you now, you vulgar thing, but—"

"Thank you, ma'am," Marie replied, curtseying with a pout.

"Thank you, indeed. Wait and see what Dr. Villebois will say to you. You dare to simper and smile after this?"

Marie readjusted her pillows, and her lips curled in a defiant smile, for she knew the doctor would take her part every time. Hadn't he on one occasion given her a brooch instead of dismissing her when madame drove her out of the room, and on another occasion a pair of turquoise ear-rings, when she handed her over to her spouse for reprimand and dismissal?

"Can I do anything more for madame?" she replied with her sweetest smile.

"Go away, you hussy. I shall send for the doctor immediately."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Marie again, as she bowed herself out of the room.

"Of all the impudent, brazen-faced minxes I have ever seen, Marie is the worst," said madame to herself, as she heard the door close behind her. "The idea of such a thing! I would have sent her about her business there and then, only I know I cannot do without her. The airs these hussies put on, I don't really know what the world is coming to with their scandalous behaviour. Had it been an officer who kissed her, it would not have mattered—but a cook, with a double chin and whiskers! Holy Mary!" and the good lady crossed herself and sank down among the pillows to dream of the wickedness of femmes de chambre in general, and her own amazing

righteousness. It was half-past nine when the rest of the party sat down to breakfast in the salle a manger of the hotel. Marcel, flushed and tired, entered the room and looked round to see if he could detect the culprit among the numerous guests, and failing that, sat down next to Riche who did his best to soothe his ruffled feelings.

"I hope, my dear chap, that the pain has gone, and that you are none the worse for the practical joke which was played on you last night," said Villebois, standing up and bowing to him as he sat down.

Marcel returned the salutation. "Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, wiping his brow with a gorgeous purple silk handkerchief, "no one can imagine what I have suffered. Even Dives could not have experienced worse sensations in his tongue in Hades than I did in my chest. I declare a flogging would not have hurt half as much. You should see my skin, it is all covered with blisters the size of a five-franc piece. If it had not been for my friend Riche who spread a handkerchief covered with Carron oil and dionine over it, I should not have been here this morning to breakfast, that's certain. Oh! if I could only meet the rascal who played me that trick, I would compel him to wear a plaster like mine for a week."

Just at the moment Monsieur Beaupaire was seized with a furious fit of coughing and wheezing. "I am afraid," said Villebois, "the medicine and plaster which I prescribed did not do its work as well as I expected."

"Medicine and plaster!" exclaimed Beaupaire with a look of astonishment. "I never saw either of them, although I remember you gave me the prescription with both remedies written down."

Marcel looked up in surprise and whispered something to Riche, while Violette blushed up to the roots of her hair, and bent down to pick up her napkin which she had purposely dropped. "Oh dear!" she whispered to Céleste who was sitting between her and Riche, "whatever will become of me?" and her face expressed unutterable things.

"Why! what have you done?"

Just then Céleste happened to lean back, and Violette turning half round, caught Riche's eye just as she was

drinking her coffee, which caused her to swallow it in such a hurry that it nearly choked her. She set her cup down, and whispering into Céleste's ear, walked quickly out of the salle a manger followed by Céleste.

The two girls closed the door, ran quickly upstairs, and locked themselves in Violette's bedroom.

"Now tell me all about it," said Céleste, as they seated themselves on the ottoman.

"Oh! it's too dreadful for words," said Violette. "I asked Dr. Villebois to allow me to prepare the plaster for papa, and put it on him myself. I made a lovely one, and put three times as much mustard on it as I was ordered, as I wanted it to do him ever so much good. Well, I uncovered his chest and spread it carefully over and had just tucked him up and was about to leave when I discovered to my horror that I had entered the wrong room, and had put the plaster on a strange gentleman. I dared not take it off for fear of waking him, and so I crept out of the room on tiptoe. Later on when the people came rushing upstairs I ran to see what was the matter, and found out to my horror that the unfortunate man was—whom do you think?"

"Riche?"

"No, my dear—Marcel! Good Heavens! what shall I do? He will never forgive me."

Céleste gave a little cry of surprise.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, putting her arm round Violette's shoulder, "what a dreadful mistake to make, but I am sure, dear, with a little tact, you will be able to put matters right."

"Do you really think he will ever forgive me?" Violette asked, looking into her face for some gleam of hope.

"Oh yes, of course he will. I know Marcel far better than you do. He is really a very nice man, and has far too much sense of humour to be angry for long. Besides, you know the Italian proverb 'Ad ogni cosa e rimedio fuora ch'alla morte.'"

"Thank you ever so much, dear, for your sympathy and advice. I shall be much happier now," and so saying they left the room together.

Meanwhile, Riche had taken in the whole situation.

"I say, my boy," he said to Marcel, "I've found out the culprit at last."

"Who? Where?" cried Marcel in an excited voice.

"Why, that young lady who was sitting on the other side of Céleste."

Marcel turned round and looked at the position indicated.

"Why, you surely don't mean Mademoiselle Beaupaire?"

"Yes, of course I do. I saw her blushing furiously a few minutes ago, and I noticed her turn her face away the moment you happened to look in her direction. Oh, there can be no doubt about it."

"By Jove, I understand it all now, it's as clear as daylight," said Marcel, slapping Riche's thigh. "What a fool I was not to see it before. The explanation is quite simple; she mistook my bedroom for her father's, and as it was dark she put the plaster on the wrong man."

"Ha! ha! you've hit it, my boy, it's immensely funny. Ha! ha!" and Riche and Marcel both held their sides and shook with laughter.

"Oh! my chest, my chest," cried Marcel, "don't make me laugh so, and the tears streamed down his cheeks with the pain caused by his laughing.

"But I say, Riche," he said as he calmed down, "it's a terrible blow to me."

"Why?" asked Riche, looking at him with a curious smile.

"Well, you know I—ahem—have taken quite a fancy to her. She's a ripping girl, and as clever as they make them, and I am afraid this silly mistake has upset the whole apple-cart."

"Are you really so gone on her as all that?" enquired Riche with a wink of his eye.

"Well, I confess I am a bit in love with her. By Jove, Riche, she is the finest girl in all France."

"My word, you must be in love with her," Riche replied, "I had not the least idea that the little blind god had wounded you so deeply; ma foi! but it's becoming serious."

"Really, monsieur, you must not joke at me like this. If you only knew what a splendid girl she is, and how my future happiness depends on my getting her hand, you would not laugh at me."

Riche gave a low whistle. "By Jove," he said to himself, "he is madly in love with her and no mistake."

"Come! let's drop the subject," he said in a voice of despair, "all my hopes are shattered by that cursed plaster. It's finished now, and it is no good crying over spilt milk."

"What nonsense you are talking. My dear boy, it's the finest thing for you that could ever have happened."

"The finest thing that could have happened? What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow, you've got the game in your own hands now. By putting that beastly plaster, as you call it, on your chest, she handed you the trump card. You have only to appear angry to bring her to her knees, and you can name your own conditions of capitulation. Get a diamond ring, my boy, and the sooner the better."

"Do you really think she will let me put it on her finger?"

"If she likes you ever so little, and has no one else on her string she will, especially if you make your declaration of love at the psychological moment."

"And how am I to know when that is?" enquired Marcel in a tone of great anxiety.

"When she comes to beg your forgiveness. But," added Riche, "you must not forgive her right away, you must first play with your fish. Pay out the line until the fish is getting exhausted, and then you will be able to haul it in without any difficulty."

"Upon my soul, Riche, you are an artful card. Where did you manage to learn these things?"

"Ich habe gelebt and geliebt," replied Riche with a smile, humming Schubert's well known air.

Marcel wrung his hand. "Thanks awfully. I will follow your advice to the letter," and going into the hall he picked up his hat and stick and left the hotel arm in arm with his friend to see the beauties and sights of the place, but more especially with the object of purchasing the ring to adorn his divinity's hand, so as to be ready for the attack when they returned for lunch.

Meanwhile Delapine was walking arm in arm with Monsieur Payot and Renée up and down the broad terrace of the hotel.

"Where are we now?" said Payot to Delapine who was well acquanted with the Riviera.

"We are at present in the little seaside town of Beaulieu, which may be called a suburb of Villefranche, the town you see on the right snugly nestled in the little bay formed by the promontory over there," and he pointed with his stick.

"What is the town still further away on our right?" said Renée as she stood looking at a handsome steam yacht which was making its way towards the bay of Villefranche.

"That is Nice which we passed last night in the train, and further away you can just catch sight of Var and Antibes. That white streak there is the carriage road—the Corniche—one of the most celebrated roads in Europe which extends along the entire coast of the Riviera. Dante trod the road when an exile from Italy, and it suggested to him a road out of purgatory. In those days it was a terrible pass hewn out of the solid rock, now rising to giddy heights, and now dropping almost to the sea level. At times half hidden by great projecting rocks, and again splashed by mountain streams and disappearing into deep gorges covered with trees and ferns, it formed a majestic image to Dante of the ascent from the Purgatorial Sea."

"But, Henri, it does not seem dreadful at all to me."

"Not now; thanks to modern engineering, instead of being a rugged road on which a slip was frequently fatal, it is now a magnificent carriage road as smooth as this terrace and quite as safe. We shall walk along it this afternoon, when we will inspect the buildings and grounds of Monte Carlo, and I think you will say that you could never be tired of viewing such lovely scenery as we shall see, such wonderful variety does it offer.

"Look," he said, pointing with his stick to the verdure-clad mountains which formed the background to the picture, "how beautiful it is. See how the slopes are covered with olive, almond, carouba, and pine trees which grow here in such perfection as you will seek for elsewhere in vain. What could be finer? See far away in the distance the chain of the Alpes Maritimes with their summits decked with snow. Now come with me round the terrace. Do you see that great isolated rock towards Nice, standing out all by itself surmounted by a great ivy-coloured castle?

That is the castle of Eza. See how brown with age it looks, clothed with pellitory and ivy."

"When was it built, Henri?"

"It dates from the time of the Saracens at the beginning of the ninth century, just after the death of Charlemagne during the golden age of the great Haroun al Raschid."

"Look, Henri, at that immense bank of rhododendrons forming a crimson carpet above the Corniche road. What a feast of colour for a painter."

"Yes," said the professor, "and look at that ruined temple with its Doric pillars entwined with African ivy. There, don't you see it—just above the quaint village of Turbia, or La Turbie as it is generally called, between those two limestone peaks, high above the rocky promontory of Monaco, and close to the fearful precipices of the Tête du chien. That is the triumphal tower, or Trophaea, built by Augustus to commemorate his victory over the Ligurians, and which marked the boundary between Gaul and Italy. In its perfect condition it formed a magnificent tower crowned as it was by a statue of the Emperor over twenty feet high. It must have presented an imposing appearance when surrounded by the camp of the Roman legions. What a contrast between the turmoil of war, the marching to and fro of the soldiers, the clashing of arms in those days, and the peaceful single white street bordered by houses and inns on either side, as it exists to-day. Now only a mighty ruin remains to recall its former greatness."

"Oh, yes," said Renée, "I remember I read about it in Tennyson's *Daisy*."

"Why, Renée, what a memory you have!"

"Not at all, Henri. You see I knew I was going to the Riviera, so I read up all I could about the place; and now the places seem like old friends."

"That is the way to travel, it is the only way to enjoy the scenery."

"Where are we going when the rest of the party returns?" asked Renée.

"Do you see that steep stony path near the funicular railway leading down the hill from La Turbie?"

"Yes, I do quite well."

"Well, do you notice where it leads to?"

"Oh yes, it leads down to the rock covered with houses which I see to the East."

"That is Monaco. Down below on the West—you cannot see it from here—is the bathing beach of Condamine, and the chapel of Saint Devote, the patron saint of Monaco, and there on the rocky slopes of the Spelugues hard by to the north of the bay are grouped the various buildings of the Casino, surrounded by villas, beautiful gardens and hotels which are largely patronised by the players. That finely decorated building standing on the edge of the cliff by the gardens of St. Martin is the Oceanographic museum which is filled by the wonderful collection of marine products collected by the Prince of Monaco. A most interesting exhibit, I assure you, and one which I am never tired of visiting. But that is not what I have come here to see this time.

"Look," said the professor, continuing the conversation as he pointed to the Casino, "that is the sole object of our expedition, and when I have done my business there, I intend to return to Paris."

"But surely, professor, you are not going to waste your time in playing at the Casino?" said Payot and Renée in the same breath. "We never knew you gambled."

"I never gamble—when I play, I play with knowledge, and I intend to teach the Casino Company and their dupes a lesson which they will never forget, and I trust we shall all profit by it."

"You speak in enigmas, professor," said Payot.

"All truth is an enigma, sir," replied Delapine with a quiet and somewhat cynical smile, and at the same time throwing at Payot one of those piercing glances with which he so frequently electrified his audiences.

Renée looked at Delapine with her brown eyes filled with an enquiring look of wonderment, and then turned to her father to see what reply he would make, but Payot said nothing, he merely evaded a reply by tracing figures with his cane on the sand.

The professor sat down on a chair and became absorbed in deep thought. Renée looked alarmed, as she fancied he was about to go off in another trance. Suddenly he sprang up. "Excuse me," he said, "I perceive that our

two friends Riche and Marcel are in trouble. I must go and rescue them," and without another word he donned his slouch hat and went out of the hotel grounds with rapid strides.

"What on earth is he up to?" said Payot.

"I can't imagine, but if Riche and Marcel are in trouble Henri will get them out of their mess. Didn't you hear him tell us he would?"

"But how on earth is he able to know when he is not there to see?"

"You must ask Henri that question," said Renée. "He will tell you."

It was a lovely winter's morning. The blue sky covered the deep sapphire blue of the Gulf of Genoa like a great turquoise dome painted here and there with long fleecy clouds, while the restless sea broke into tiny ripples as it lapped against the rocky cliffs of the shore, forming feathery waves like the white wings of the seagulls.

Marcel and Riche walked along the broad white carriage road, looking at the motor-cars and carriages as they rolled along with gaily dressed ladies, shading themselves with parasols of every colour. Here and there they encountered women from the country with bronzed, withered faces like Normandy pippins, carrying huge baskets to market balanced on their heads filled with fruit or vegetables. Then a score of noisy children ran pell mell across the road from the national school, shouting to each other as they ran with satchels on their backs filled with lesson books. A little further on a herd of goats obstructed the way, butting each other with their horns, or lingering at the roadside to nibble the herbage, while an Italian boy with bare feet ran hither and thither urging them forward with a stick, and calling his dog to assist him.

The road crossed deep gorges bordered with locust trees, pines and castania trees, while here and there were aged olive trees with their shrunken, gnarled and twisted trunks filled with the dust of years between the crevices of the bark. Wonderful limestone rocks towered up the hill on the left like mediæval ruined castles varying from a creamy white to pale lilac or deep crimson. At one spot a stream of clear water trickled down, besprinkling with its spray soft

cushions of velvety moss embroidered with lichens, maidenhair ferns, aspleniums, and the beautiful white star-like leucorium nicæense. Here and there bunches of convolvuli and cistuses unfolded their crimson and purple trumpets.

Further on the village of Roccabrunna could be seen nestling among the brown rocks and huge boulders which had fallen ages before, and become partly cemented to the hillside with undergrowth and soil. Capping the summit half hidden among the houses, the ruins of the mediæval castle of the Lascaris arrested his eye, surrounded by lemon and orange trees.

Now the road turns aside through the village of Monaco, and on the right he saw in front of him the bold promontory of Monaco rising three hundred and fifty feet above the sea, which washed three of its sides where they dipped almost perpendicularly into the blue waters. All the way along on either side were lovely villas surrounded by well-kept gardens filled with flowers of every hue and kind. Cacti, palms, aloes, camphor trees, monkey trees, citron and orange trees abounded, the latter filling the air with their fragrant perfume. In the largest gardens they observed numerous specimens of the cedar of Lebanon, flat-topped pines, arancarius, Californian pines—the whole contributing to make this spot a veritable garden of Eden.

At length they passed a large jeweller's shop with a magnificent display of diamond and ruby rings in a case in the window.

"See here," cried Marcel, "the very thing." He went in and asked to be allowed to inspect a selection of engagement rings. Having made his choice he became so engrossed with admiring the various objects of art that Riche, getting tired, told his friend that he would stroll slowly on, and bid him follow on after he had finished.

It was fully half an hour before Marcel had completed his inventory of the shop, when looking at his watch was surprised to find how time had slipped by. Hurrying out Marcel walked rapidly in the direction where he knew he would find his friend. He had not gone more than a mile when he suddenly heard a babel of voices, and to his surprise saw a large crowd surrounding a Piedmontese

beggar holding a brown bear by a chain. The man was violently gesticulating at a gentleman who was trying to defend himself against the menaces of the crowd, and was struggling with two gendarmes who appeared anxious to arrest him.

"Hullo, Riche!" cried Marcel, running breathlessly up and pushing his way to him through the crowd. "What's up? What are they pulling you about for?"

"I saw this brute of an Italian belabouring his bear over the head with a stick, and pulling the chain until his nose was covered with blood, and my blood was up, so I gave the fellow a taste of the beating that he had given the bear, and then the gendarmes, hearing the row, came up and arrested me."

Riche struggled with the gendarmes, tried to get free, and twisting his leg between those of one of the gendarmes Jiu-Jitsu fashion, threw him on the ground.

Marcel flung himself on the officer, and Riche would have got free, but the second slipped a noose of whip-cord over Riche's wrist, and drawing it tight, twisted it with a bit of stick so violently that he almost fainted with the pain.

Marcel was struggling on the ground with the officer, when a third policeman pushed his way through the crowd, and they were promptly marched away as prisoners towards the gendarmerie, followed by a crowd of idlers.

"What have those Allemands done?" cried a workman in a blouse, to his boon companion who was smoking the filthy stump of a cigarette.

"Ma foi, the rascals have been caught pocket-picking—serve them jolly well right too. I saw them do it. Come, comrade, we will give evidence and get them well lodged in the Violon. Ils sont des sacr—res Allemands."

At this moment a carriage and pair came dashing up, and a footman arrayed in gorgeous livery descended from his perch and opened the door. A general, magnificently attired in full dress uniform with a row of orders on his breast, stepped out, carrying his head proudly in the air, and looking for all the world like one of the old heroes of Gravelotte with his venerable-looking white locks and greyish white beard and moustache. The crowd made

way for him and cheered as he marched with a firm military step towards the struggling prisoners.

"Halt!" he cried in a voice of thunder, as the gendarmes, petrified with astonishment, stood at attention immediately and saluted him.

"What are you doing with those two gentlemen?" he demanded in an imperious tone.

"We are taking them to the gendarmerie for assaulting this Piedmontese with his bear, and for violently resisting us while we were performing our duty in arresting him. One of them threw my comrade on to the ground and would have killed him had not a third member of the force arrived."

"I command you to release them immediately. Are you aware that they happen to be particular friends of mine, and belong to the Embassy? I shall hold you all three responsible for this. Give me your names at once. Do you hear me?" he said, as he stamped his foot on the ground with impatience as they hesitated to obey him.

Trembling with fear they wrote their names and numbers on a card, and handed it to him.

"Now go," he cried, "and take care not to touch my friends again, or beware——" and he shook a warning finger at them.

The three gendarmes stepped back a couple of paces, saluted, and then turning round speedily became lost in the crowd.

"Now step into my carriage," said the General as the footman opened the door for the two guests.

As soon as they were seated the General ordered the coachman to turn back and drive at full speed. Riche and Marcel stared at the General, and then looked at each other for an explanation.

"Whom have we the honour of addressing?" they both asked.

"General Alfieri, Commander of the Grand Cordon of the Order of Savoy, very much at your service, gentlemen."

"Accept our humble and most sincere thanks, General. We cannot thank you sufficiently both for your well-timed help, and for your extreme courtesy and attention."

"I accept your thanks, and request you to give me the

pleasure of your company to lunch. Where may you be staying?"

"At the Hotel des Anglais, Beaulieu."

"Coachman, drive to the Hotel des Anglais, these gentlemen may desire to alight in order to arrange their toilette."

Riche and Marcel were more astonished than ever. "General Alfieri," they whispered to each other. "Who on earth could he be—some Italian General of high rank evidently. But what could he be doing in the territory of the Prince of Monte Carlo, which does not belong to Italy, and how could he possibly know us?"

In a few minutes they arrived at the hotel, and all three descended.

"Pray step in," said the General, "and I will follow directly."

As Riche and Marcel entered the hall the General stepped up to the coachman, and handing him a bank note dismissed him.

"Now, gentlemen, pray retire to your rooms, and when you are ready you will find me waiting for you in the hall."

As soon as Riche and Marcel had retired to their rooms, the General entered his, and after completing his ablutions and exchanging his military clothes for a civilian costume he returned to the hall. A few minutes later Riche and Marcel came down the stairs together.

"I say, professor, where have you sprung from?" said Marcel. "By the way, have you noticed a General in full uniform in the hotel?"

"No, I've seen no military man at all here, but I happened to notice a General in full uniform drive up to the front and enter the hotel. He was a fine, venerable looking man with white hair and a greyish white moustache and beard."

"That's the gentleman we want. You have described him exactly. But where has he gone to?" they enquried eagerly.

"I can't imagine. I only know that I heard him order the coachman to drive away, as he would not be wanted again."

"Surely, professor, you must be mistaken," replied

Marcel, "as the General not only got us out of a terrible scrape, but was kind enough to drive us here and actually invited us to lunch. In fact he bid us remove the traces of our scrimmage with those beastly gendarmes who tried to arrest us, and then meet him here in the hall."

"If he had not been so kind in the first instance," added Riche, "I should have imagined that he was playing us a joke."

"But why suggest such things?" said Delapine. "If he said he would wait for you here, he must be here."

"Please do not jest like this, professor, it is too serious a thing, we must go and look for him at once."

"Are you sure that it is necessary to do that?" said Delapine.

"What do you mean?" they both asked.

"I mean what I say. The General kept his word, and is waiting on you now."

"Where, where?" and Riche and Marcel looked up and down the passages in vain.

"Why, here, you silly chaps. Can't you recognise me?" and Delapine gave a merry twinkle with his eyes.

"What! You don't mean to say that you were the General?"

"Why not?" said the professor, turning his back to them and quickly donning his false beard and moustache and wig. "Now look at me," said he, turning round and saluting them.

"If this isn't just the top hole," said Marcel and Riche in a duet. "Whoever would have thought of it, but tell us, how did you manage to know where we were?"

"Oh! that was simplicity itself. I watched you both going out, and then I fell into one of those dreamy states in which my subliminal or other-self rises above the threshold—as Meyers used to say—and then this other-self, partly freed from my animal body, has greatly increased powers, which enables me to perceive things which are entirely invisible to the eye, since psychic sight is affected by altogether different laws from those which govern ordinary vision, and moreover it is quite independent of distance. The moment I fell into my hypnotic reverie, I saw Marcel sauntering along the Corniche in the direction

of Monaco with my mind sight as clearly as I see you now, and I watched him half kill the Italian with his stick for maltreating a bear, and suspecting what would happen I hurriedly left the hotel, borrowed a General's uniform, pinned on all the second-hand orders I could lay my hands on, and telephoned immediately for the most expensive carriage and pair in the place. At the same time I telephoned to the Metropole at Monte Carlo for two footmen in livery. They climbed up on to the box-seat and I got into the carriage, and the one whom I selected as coachman drove as fast as possible to the spot where I knew I should meet you—and here we are," said the professor with a beaming smile. "Come, gentlemen, let me take you to lunch, as I promised you in the carriage. I think our good friends Beaupaire and Payot, as well as the ladies are expecting us."

"Great Scott!" whispered Marcel to Riche, "Mephistopheles is a fool beside our professor."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PROFESSOR DISCOURSES ON GAMBLING

"Le hasard n'est rien. Il n'est point de hasard. Nous avons nominè l'effet que nous voyons d'une cause que nous ne voyons pas."
VOLTAIRE, *Lettres de Memmius*, III.

Chance is nothing. There is no such thing as chance. What we call by that name is the effect which we see of a cause which we do not see.

"C'est le profonde ignorance qui inspire le ton dogmatique."
LA BRUYERE, *Characteres.*

"WELL, Monsieur Beaupaire, I hope that you are the better for Dr. Villebois's treatment," said Marcel as he shook hands with him in the salon while they were waiting for the dejeuner to be served.

"My dear sir, I confess I am better, but I cannot say I owe it to the doctor," and Beaupaire gave Marcel a comical look. "Perhaps in my turn I may be able to hope that you, my dear Marcel, are also better."

"Well, I am free from pain, but you must confess it was rather a mean trick to play on a man who had done your daughter no harm," said Marcel, looking at Violette and pretending to be very angry.

"Oh, Monsieur Marcel, please forgive me," said Violette, blushing furiously and looking very sheepish. "I really did not mean to do it."

"You didn't mean to do it, then why did you do so? I received a fearful shock, and suffered agonies for some hours afterwards."

Before Violette could reply, lunch was announced, and Marcel, following his friend Riche's advice, bowed stiffly to Violette and followed Beaupaire and Riche to the salle a manger.

Violette felt very uncomfortable and miserable as she puckered up her mouth and gave a little sigh. But it did not escape Riche who was watching the effect of Marcel's words with the eye of a connoisseur.

"It's all right, my boy," he whispered to Marcel as they sat down together, "your case argues well. I can see that you will win her."

"How do you know that?" Marcel enquired.

"Quite simply. Did you not see when she sat down that she gave a little sigh? That's one point. Then again I observed the comical look that her father gave you when he trusted that you were also better. Now, my boy, all you have to do is to keep your head and go steady, and she's yours as sure as my name's Riche."

After lunch Marcel arranged to meet Violette at a spot where he could talk to her unobserved. It required some manœuvring as there were very few places unoccupied. Riche very cunningly acted as a decoy by first luring Violette into an unoccupied room, and then by making way for Marcel, who entered the room apparently quite unconscious that anyone was there. On seeing Violette he uttered an apology, and bowing very politely turned round as if he intended to leave the room, when Violette stopped him.

"Pardon me, Monsieur Marcel, I cannot allow you to leave without obtaining your forgiveness for the injury I have done you. You will forgive me, won't you? I wanted to ask you before lunch but we were interrupted."

"Certainly I'll forgive you, and now let us shake hands to show that we have made it up."

Violette held out her right hand.

"No," said Marcel, "one hand won't do for me, I must have both."

Violette laughed and held out both.

"That is better," said Marcel, putting his hand in his pocket and pulling out a lovely diamond ring which he very adroitly slipped on the fourth finger of her left hand, taking care to slip it past the joint.

Violette drew back with a little scream. "How dare you take a mean advantage of me like that? You're a horrid man, I hate you," and suiting her action to her

words she tried to pull it off. But the ring which Marcel had carefully selected to ensure its fitting tightly refused to budge, much to his delight.

"I believe you selected a tight fitting ring on purpose," she said in an angry tone of voice, looking very cross and almost in tears.

Marcel took his scolding with such a good-natured smile that Violette felt she would have to laugh if she stayed any longer, so rushing past him she ran to her father who was sitting down in an easy chair in the next room.

"Father, just look at what Monsieur Marcel has done to me," and she held out a very pretty finger for his inspection.

"That's a very charming ring he has given you," he replied with a knowing wink.

"But, father, only think of his impudence in slipping the ring on my finger by a horrid ruse, without even asking my permission. I think it was a very mean trick to take advantage of me like that. Don't you agree with me?"

"Well, to tell the truth I confess if I had been in his place I would have done exactly the same thing," and Beaupaire burst into a hearty laugh.

"Father, I don't like you a bit, I think you are horrid. I don't want his ring," and she tried to pull it off once more. "Oh, this wretched ring how am I to get it off?"

"Don't be a little goose, keep it on, my dear," and he took hold of her hand and patted it affectionately. "I admire Monsieur Marcel's taste. It is really a superb ring, and you ought to be very proud of it."

Violette stamped her pretty foot on the floor.

"Why do you always take Monsieur Marcel's part?" she asked with a little pout of vexation.

"My dear child, I consider him to be a very charming man, clever, highly polished and accomplished, very affectionate, and moreover the possessor of a most respectable private income. Why, what more do you want? He is a man who would make a most desirable husband. Besides, I have every reason to believe that he sincerely loves you."

"But, father, do you really mean it?"

At this moment Marcel, who had been listening with his ear against the door, came in.

Beaupaire came up and shook hands with him.

"My boy, I could not wish for a better man for a son-in-law."

"And I could not wish for a better lady for a wife than Violette," replied Marcel, his courage rising to undreamed-of heights.

"Take her, my boy, and if she loves you, as I have no doubt she does, you will be a very happy man."

Violette blushed up to the roots of her hair, and Marcel took her by the hand and asked her forgiveness.

"Well," she answered, laughing, "we are quits now."

"No, dear," replied Marcel, giving her a kiss on both cheeks, "not quits but one."

"Do you really love me, George?" she enquired, looking up into his face.

"I loved you all the time, Violette, from the moment I first saw you."

Violette flung her arms round him and embraced him passionately.

"So did I," she whispered.

"Now, you silly children," said Beaupaire with a smile of satisfaction, "you must make haste and get ready as the professor is on the point of taking us to Monte Carlo."

Three carriages had been ordered, and at length the party, personally conducted by the professor, entered the gardens of Monte Carlo.

"Here we are at last," said Delapine, "but before we enter the Casino let us take a short walk round the buildings."

"In my opinion," said the professor, "Monte Carlo is the gem of the Riviera. Here art and nature have contested for the palm of beauty. To complete this fairy scene it was necessary for man to contribute the magic of his art. Everything has been done by art to stimulate the imagination. Note how the wild rocks have been blasted and hewn out into broad and beautiful terraces, and how these are approached by graceful stone steps wrought into exquisite curves and supported on either side by numerous carved balustrades. Observe the smooth well-kept lawns

and terraced gardens and verandahs—the rich colouring of the flowers, and the tropical plants and trees, while everything is kept in the most perfect order and neatness. But although art has contributed such pleasing effects, nature, not to be outdone, has laid bare the rugged rocks and stupendous precipices as if to mock the carefully thought out works of man. She has carved out the bay, and allowed this bold promontory to project into the sea as if to defy the elements. Just look at the exquisite fringe of the sea as the waves toss their spray against the iron-bound rocks. It is both grand and beautiful."

As the party walked round the Casino they heard a number of sharp reports as if from a number of men firing.

"Oh! dear," cried Madame Villebois, "to think of these poor fellows committing suicide in this dreadful way. I suppose they have all been ruined in the Casino, and are now putting an end to themselves."

Villebois and Riche burst out laughing.

"I am ashamed of both of you, and you, Adolphe, ought to know better than to laugh at such misery."

"Come this way, madame, and I will show you the suicides," said the professor, "and you can then judge for yourself."

He conducted Madame Villebois, with great reluctance on her part, to a spot where she could see the pigeon club. A number of members of the club attired in the very latest and most approved costumes were watching a couple of sportsmen alternately firing at some pigeons which were being liberated from a row of traps.

"These are your suicides, madame," said the professor, smiling.

An elegantly dressed young lady, obviously belonging to the demi-monde world, walked up to one of the sportsmen.

"Well, monsieur, it is a surprise to see you here. I suppose you have come here for the pigeon match?"

"That is so, I am here for the shooting. And what are you here for?"

"Me? Oh! I am here for the pigeons."

The young man looked amused, and offering her his arm they strolled together into the club.

Delapine and his party retraced their steps along the terrace to the Casino. As they approached they heard the strains of a fine band playing near at hand. "Come let us listen, there is nothing to pay, for everything is free at Monte Carlo."

"Look! Here are Charley and Ridgeway," said Beaupaire to Violette.

"How do you do," said Charley, taking off his hat to Violette and her father. "I suppose you are going into the Casino?"

"Yes, we are going there directly," said the professor, who overheard what had just been said.

"May we accompany you?" asked the two Englishmen.

"Certainly, by all means," replied Delapine, "but I would advise you not to play unless you can afford to lose."

"But we can afford to lose."

"Then you have no need to play," replied Delapine, smiling.

Charley and Ridgeway said nothing, but looked at each other and laughed.

Before them towered the Casino. They saw a large profusely decorated monstrosity, erected regardless of expense, which was surmounted at each end by a lofty tower. The building gave one the impression that it had been built under the direction of some millionaire pork-packer hailing from Chicago, rather than by the great architect of the famous Opera House in Paris.

The party ascended the steps, and Delapine procured the tickets of admission after a few formalities had been gone through.

"Now let us watch the fools lose their money," said Delapine as they entered the Salon du Jeu.

Renée and Céleste opened their eyes wide as they entered the huge gilded salon.

"If it were not for the double row of people standing round those seated at the tables, it might be an examination hall!" said Marcel.

A row of ladies and gentlemen occupied every side of the dozen or more green-covered tables, all intently gazing at a little ball as it hopped about the wheel which revolved at the bottom of a large metal basin.

The party looked from one table to another. They were all replicas of the first, although the phase of the game was different. Here the people gathered around were busy placing coins on one or other of the numerous squares marked out on the green cloth.

"Permit me to explain the game," said Delapine, pointing to the table in front of him. "Watch the little wheel which the croupier has just spun rapidly. You see it is divided into 37 equal compartments, each bearing a number from 1 to 36, eighteen are coloured red, and eighteen black, the remaining one being white, and is called Zero. The croupier has just dropped the ball in the centre wheel which he has caused to spin in the reverse direction. Now the wheel is slowing down, and the ball rushes hither and thither knocking against various obstructions until it drops into one of the 37 pockets. Contrary to the prevalent idea you will observe that the players have a large choice in the methods of staking their money. They may back red (rouge), or black (noir), odd (impair) or even numbers (pair) or they may put their money in the square representing any number below 19 (manque), or on the square representing any number exceeding 18 (passe). In all these cases if they win they receive the same amount as they have staked. Again the player may place the stake on any single number which may be chosen, including Zero, in which case as the chances are 36 to 1 against him, he receives 35 times the stake. If, however, the ball falls into Zero, the croupier gathers in every stake on the table, only paying those who have backed Zero. The stakes, if they have been made on even chances, are put, as they say, 'in prison' until the next throw, when they will be returned to the player if the throw is favourable to them, but if not, then they lose them. But a player can take such stakes out of prison by paying half their value. Moreover you will notice that the table is divided into three long columns, and sub-divided by two horizontal lines, so that there are nine large squares. The centre squares are sub-divided into three smaller ones each bearing one of the 36 numbers, while the outer large squares represent 'Passe,' 'Pair' and 'Noir' on the one side, and 'Manque,' 'Impair'

and 'Rouge' on the other side, Zero being by itself at the top.

This is the essence of the game, and the bank plays mechanically, but absolutely fairly. The whole secret of the success of the bank lies in the Zero It is a wonderfully thought-out game," continued the professor. "Omit Zero and whether you back red or black, odd or even, or above or below 18, the chances are exactly even—it is the fatal Zero which turns the scale all the time in favour of the bank, and no matter what system is adopted the player is invariably beaten by the Zero, provided he only plays long enough.[1] It is like the old legend of the soul playing a game of chess with death. He may beat his adversary time after time—but the fleshless fingers of death always gain the victory in the end."

"Look at these fools," continued Delapine as he pointed at the silent players. "Watch them with their note books entering the numbers down. They all have their pet 'systems.' Some stake their money on their birthday number, or the number of black cats they have seen during the day, or a certain number they may happen to have dreamt of, or any other absurd superstition. The majority, however, cling to the Martingale fallacy."

"What is that?" asked Payot.

"A system based on faulty reasoning," said the professor. "It is common knowledge that the same number or colour may recur two, three, four, or half a dozen times running, and this will probably occur while we are looking on, but the players think that the chances become less and less for each additional recurrence, for the same colour has never been known to recur more than twenty-five times running ever since the Casino was started forty years ago, so the players, knowing this, watched until the same colour has turned up

[1] As there are 36 numbers and one Zero, the chances are one in 37 in favour of the bank over those of the player, or 2.7 per cent., but owing to the refait which places the stakes on even chances into prison when Zero turns up, it reduces the percentage in favour of the bank on those chances to one half that, or 1.35 per cent. As, however, the money staked is turned over and over again, the bank makes 90 per cent. per annum on its total capital invested, which amounts to about twenty million francs annually.

say six or seven times running, and then they back the opposite colour, doubling their stakes each time they lose, although each time they run the risk of Zero turning up and losing everything. The stupid players imagine that they have a much better chance if they start backing the opposite colour after a considerable sequence of one colour, under the mistaken impression that what has just happened will influence the next throw. They forget that they are playing against a soulless mechanical wheel, and not against an emotional human being, and that even after red has turned up twenty-five times, the probability that black will come up next throw is not a bit greater than for red; the chances always remain exactly the same.

"Gentlemen," added Delapine gravely, "all systems have invariably failed, and always will fail, although they may often succeed for a short time."

"I wonder whether Tennyson had this in his mind," said Marcel aside to Violette, "when he said:—

> "'Our little systems have their day,
> They have their day and cease to be,
> They have no chance to cope with thee,
> And thou, O Blanc,[1] art more than they.'"

"O go on, Tennyson didn't really write that, did he?" enquired Violette, looking at him with a puzzled expression of mingled wonderment and doubt.

Marcel said nothing, but chuckled inwardly, and looked very knowingly.

"There is only one infallible way to get the better of the bank," continued Delapine.

"Oh! please, professor, do tell us what that is," they all exclaimed.

"Hush," said Delapine, "not so loud. Only wait until to-morrow and you shall all see it for yourselves."

"Just look at that horrid old woman," said Violette in a half whisper. "I saw her distinctly grab the winnings of another party who had placed her gold piece on the line

[1] M. Blanc established the tables, and his family hold most of the shares.

between two squares (à cheval I think you call it.) Look, professor," and she pointed her out to him.

"I will soon stop her little game," said Delapine who had already detected her at it.

Taking half a dozen Napoleons from his pocket, he wrote the words 'Je suis voleur' (I am a thief) across the face of each in bold black letters, and stepping forwards he tossed them with the printed face downwards on the lines of several squares near her. The wheel spun round, and just before the croupier shouted the usual formula "No further play allowed," the woman in question gently pushed one of the coins with her sleeve over the border into the "manque" square. The ball dropped into number ten. "Dix, noir, pair, et manque," cried the croupier. Her piece was pushed towards her by the dealer as at the same time he tossed a Napoleon into the manque square. The old lady at once picked the two coins up, but Delapine was too quick for her. Seizing her closed hand he said very quietly, "Excuse me, these are my winnings."

The lady became highly indignant. "How dare you," she cried, "these are my coins. One of them I put down myself and the other was added by the croupier."

Delapine immediately called one of the officials.

"Open your hand, madame, and let the coin be your judge before this official."

The lady stared at Delapine and hesitated to do so, but the look the professor gave her caused her to obey him at once.

"Please turn the coins over," said Delapine to the attendant. He turned them over and the words "Je suis voleur" stared her in the face.

She dropped the coins and grew pale as death.

The lady was at once escorted to the door by two officials, and politely bowed out of the building, vehemently protesting her innocence. Four out of the six stakes were in Delapine's favour, and handing his winnings to the officials he quietly walked to another part of the room.

"Do tell us some more about the game," said Renée to her lover.

"Well, there is not much more to say."

"Are all the people playing, and do they all play the same way?"

"By no means, they are quite different. The players may be divided into three classes," said Delapine with a cynical smile. "First, those who play in order to retrieve their fortunes with an eye to the main chance—such people invariably lose their money. Secondly, those who play merely for the fun of the thing—these sometimes win, because they know when to leave off. And lastly there are those who look on. They enjoy the fun because it costs them nothing, and at the same time they flatter their vanity by giving advice—which by the way is always wrong, with a superb faith in their own infallibility."

"Where do the plungers come in, professor?" asked Riche.

"The plungers! Oh, they consist of men who have either everything or nothing to lose, and women who always play with other people's money. Look there," he added, pointing to a beautiful fair woman with a long graceful neck ornamented by a diamond necklace ending in a magnificent diamond and sapphire pendant. She was very elegantly dressed, and was sitting at the table with a sheaf of bank notes and several rolls of gold between her hands.

"Which class does she belong to?" asked Violette.

"She is a distinguished member of the first class," replied the professor.

"Do you notice that rather handsome young man with fair curly hair, and a pointed glossy beard just standing behind her?" said Marcel. "See he is whispering something in her ear."

"What a large sum she has put on to black," exclaimed Renée.

"Yes," said Delapine, "it is the maximum stake (6,000 frs.)."

"Look! Look!" said Renée, "she has won," as she saw 12,000 frs. worth of notes passed over to her by the croupier.

The curly headed gentleman squeezed her hand, "Didn't I tell you so," he said with a smile.

Delapine's party at once became intensely interested in her, wondering what would happen next.

"See she is listening to him again, and now sheh as put

6,000 frs. on 'red,' and 6,000 frs. on 'impasse,' and the same amount on 'even.'"

"Lord! what a pile of money," said Marcel, "Wouldn't I look a lovely bird if I were to be dressed up at that expense."

"You are quite good-looking enough without spending 18,000 francs on a new suit," replied Violette, laughing.

They all watched the little ball with intense eagerness as it jumped about as if it were alive, cannoning off one obstacle after another, until at length tired of its exertions it tumbled into number 11.

"Onze, noir, impair, et manque," shouted the coupier mechanically.

"Ciel! she has lost everything, what dreadful luck," said Violette, as the croupier raked in all her notes with a remorseless movement of his little rake.

The lady turned round with quivering lips and clenched hands.

"Beast," she hissed, "why didn't you hold your silly tongue? Look what has happened through my following your advice. You assured me that I was bound to win—and now see what you have done," and she scowled at him again.

At this moment her adviser happened to glance at Delapine and the rest of his party, but apparently he was satisfied that none of them recognised him, for after giving them another glance he walked rapidly to the door and disappeared.

"I seem to know his face," said Riche.

"I was just thinking the same thing," said Marcel. "Did you recognise him, professor?"

Delapine's face clouded, and he set his lips firmly together, but did not reply.

Renée was looking at her lover, and her hand trembled as she watched the change which came over his face. She caught hold of his hand.

"Don't worry your little head, Renée," said Delapine gently. "Riche," he continued, "I should be obliged if you and Marcel will do me the favour to follow that gentleman who has just left the salon, and let me know what he is doing and where he is living. Come and report to me at the hotel. I shall be leaving myself very soon. But be sure and don't let him see you, and don't tell a soul."

Riche nodded, and taking Marcel's arm the two hurriedly left the room.

"I think I will take a photo of the scene," said Delapine to the others, "if you will allow me." So saying he rapidly focussed his camera on the lady who had lost her money, and seizing a favourable opportunity when no one was looking at him, pressed the button and secured her photograph.

"Why did you take her photograph?" said Renée, looking very anxious.

"You can trust me, can't you?" said the professor.

"Why of course. You know I didn't mean that. It can't be—Monsieur—" She saw a quivering of her lover's lips, and never concluded the sentence. A deadly pallor swept over her face, and she would have fallen had not Delapine steadied her with his arm.

"Now I think we have seen enough for to-day," said the professor, as he folded up his camera and led the way out of the Casino.

CHAPTER XXV

DELAPINE TRIES HIS HAND AT THE TABLES

"The ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But here or there as strikes the Player goes,
And he that tossed you down into the Field,
He knows about it all—He knows, HE knows."
The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám, verse lxx.

"WHERE is the professor?" asked Villebois at the breakfast table next morning. "Has anyone seen him?"

As no one had apparently done so, a deputation was agreed upon to go in search of him and bring him down.

Villebois, Payot, Marcel and Riche were selected, and the quartette marched up to his bedroom and knocked.

They found him in his dressing-gown sitting at a table apparently deep in thought. All looked at him in amazement. He seemed transformed and unearthly. His face was ghastly pale with his brilliant eyes fixed and staring, while his fingers were twitching nervously.

"Professor," exclaimed Villebois, "we have come to tell you that breakfast is nearly over, and everyone is wondering what has become of you."

But Delapine made no movement. A roulette wheel stood before him similar to those used in the Casino. Several sheets of paper covered with algebraical equations lay on the table, while at his side was a well-thumbed copy of Vega's Logarithm Tables and Bertrand's and Poincaré's *Calcul des Probabilités* lay open near it.

"Professor, we are waiting for you," said Riche, giving him a gentle slap on the back, but suddenly started back declaring that he had received something like an electric shock.

They looked at one another in astonishment.

"What on earth is the matter with him?" they asked. "Is he ill, or in a trance, or what?"

Villebois drew Riche on one side, and they held a short consultation in hurried whispers.

"Don't be alarmed, Riche," said Villebois. "What would be very serious in the case of ordinary people is not so with Delapine. I know him well, and whenever he goes into this state he is sure to do something surprising and far beyond the powers of common mortals like ourselves. My advice is to slip away quietly and return to the ladies. Whatever you do, don't wake him, but let him come round by himself."

So saying he withdrew on tip-toe, the others following him silently out of the room.

They returned to the breakfast table, and Riche with great forethought saw that breakfast was kept hot for Delapine when he should come down.

"What an extraordinary man," said Violette to Marcel who was sitting next to her.

"Yes, you would have had reason to say so if you had been in his room just now when Riche touched him and actually received a shock. It reminded me of an electric eel."

"I was positively frightened when I saw him," said Payot. "He looked transfigured and his face was wax-like and quite motionless."

"You need not be frightened, papa," said Renée, looking up. "Henri told me last night that he intended to go to the Casino this morning, and he would give the directors something to think about for a long time to come, and you know by now that when Henri says anything will happen it always does happen."

"By Jove, there's nothing more certain," said Marcel. "It reminds me of Henry Smith's story of the difference between the judge and the bishop. It happened that the Master of Balliol was giving a dinner at which the careers of two of the men belonging to the College came up for discussion—one of whom had just been made a judge, and the other a bishop.

"Which of the two is the greater man?" asked the master.

"Oh," replied Smith, "the bishop of course. A judge after all can only say 'you be hanged,' whereas, the bishop can say 'you be damned.'"

"Yes," the master rejoined, "that's all very fine, but when the bishop says 'you be damned,' there's no certainty

that you will be damned, whereas, if the judge says 'you be hanged'—well, you jolly well *will be* hanged."

"Marcel you are incorrigible," said Riche, shaking with laughter.

"But is Delapine really going to play at the Casino?" asked Villebois, as soon as they had ceased laughing.

"He told Renée and me so, didn't he, Renée?"

Renée nodded, and then added, "But I am certain of one thing, doctor, and that is he won't lose his money there. He has much too scientific a mind to take mere chances like the people we saw there yesterday. Besides, didn't he point out to us the fallacies of their systems?"

"That's true," said Villebois half to himself. "Well, well, we shall see."

At this moment the door opened, and one of the waiters came up with a note for Payot, and a message to say that the professor would be pleased to meet them in the garden in half an hour.

The note was dated the day before, and ran as follows:

DEAR M. PAYOT,

Please hand over to Renée all the money you have brought with you to Beaulieu, and permit me to have the use of it unconditionally for one day. If you have complete confidence in my powers I shall have the pleasure of returning it to-morrow with interest.

Faithfully yours,
DELAPINE.

Payot, after reading this note, went up to his room and returned in a few moments with a letter which he handed to his daughter with instructions to give it to Delapine at the very first opportunity. Shortly afterwards, according to the appointment made by Delapine, they all adjourned to the garden where they found him sitting in a little thatched summer-house, still wearing that strange weird look which they had noticed earlier in the morning.

Each in turn tried to draw him into conversation, but in vain. He remained in a dream-like attitude without speaking, while his face was as impassive and mysterious as the Sphinx. The only sign of life was in his eyes which occasionally lit up in an almost unnatural way, and then closed again.

At length he slowly rose from his seat, and with hands clasped behind his back, and with head bent as if in deep thought, walked towards the carriage drawn up in front of the hotel.

As soon as Delapine had taken his seat with the rest of the party, the coachman, who had already received his instructions, drove rapidly to Monte Carlo.

"Have you a letter for me?" asked Delapine, turning to Renée, who sat next to him.

"Oh, yes, Henri. Father gave me this for you, but I did not like to disturb your reverie, or I would have given it to you before."

Taking the letter from her hand, Delapine opened it, and found that it contained 4,000 francs in notes.

They arrived at the Casino in good time so as to enable Delapine to secure a seat close to the roulette wheel. He motioned to Renée and Payot to sit next to him, while the rest of the party stood round behind his chair.

All the people looked at him in wonder, as his vacant gaze and general mien were so unearthly, so entirely different from those of the other players, that a thrill of mingled awe and expectancy seemed to come over the whole assembly.

Delapine slowly turned his head round, fixing his intense gaze on each person in turn round the table.

"Look, look at Delapine," said Riche, as he nudged Marcel. "Doesn't he remind you of a Bengal tiger lying in ambush and turning his head slowly round to watch the movements of his prey? Parbleu, but it makes me feel quite creepy. I can imagine him lashing his tail just before making a spring."

"He is merely watching the other players, but he hasn't staked a sou himself up till now."

Meanwhile Delapine continued passively to watch the play for about twenty minutes. At the end of that time he quietly took out of the envelope three bank notes of 100 francs each, and placed one on each of the three consecutive numbers 7, 28 and 12, while putting a 1,000 franc note on each of the squares, red, impair, and manque, and then rapidly turning his head concentrated his gaze on the little ball which had just fallen on to the larger wheel.

The ball bobbed frantically about, and at length fell into No. 7.

"Sept, rouge, impair et manque," shouted the croupier, as he raked in Delapine's pieces on 28 and 12, and tossed seven notes of 500 frs. each on to No. 7, and 1,000 fr. notes on to "rouge," "impair," and "manque." Delapine's stake of 3,300 frs. was now increased by 6,300 frs.[1] Whispering a few words to Renée, telling her what numbers to back, and without troubling himself in the least about his own gains, he once more turned his attention to the little ball.

Renée immediately did as he had told her and placed the maximum allowed—180 frs.—on number 7, leaving the money with the gains added on each of the single chances, rouge, pair and manque.

Round went the wheel again, and the little ball hopped about as before.

Delapine did not move his head but continued to gaze steadily on the ball.

Five times running Renée repeated the process, each time leaving the maximum—6,000 frs.—on each even chance, and the maximum on the single number. At last she ceased for a moment and counted the notes in hand. She had won 120,000 francs.

All this time Delapine had remained motionless with his eyes fixed like a carved Buddha. At length he leaned over and whispered to Renée, who immediately transferred the maximum stakes to three fresh numbers and different squares.

The whole thing was done so quietly and so unobtrusively that only an onlooker who had been specially regarding him could have noticed that Delapine had made the slightest movement.

Occasionally he would take half-a-dozen gold pieces and rapidly throw them on to as many squares or numbers, without troubling his head in the least as to whether they won or lost.

But Renée was winning so fast that she became the

[1] No. 7 won 3,500 frs., the three even bets won 3,000 frs. : nos. 28 and 12 lost 200 frs.

centre of attraction for the crowd which grew more and more dense at the table, little dreaming that it was the quiet professor at her side and not the player herself who was manipulating the stakes, and who was responsible for all her marvellous good fortune.

Strangely enough, Delapine lost his own little stakes more often than he won, as he allowed them to remain on any squares they chanced to fall on. Now and again a coin would drop on the line between two squares—à cheval—or covering four numbers—en carré. Sometimes the croupier would sweep them into the bank—sometimes Delapine would receive eleven or eight times his stake. When this happened he would quietly pick up his winnings so as to compensate for his other losses, but as often as not he did not trouble to collect his winnings, but allowed them to remain on the table until they were swept off by the remorseless rake.

"Look at that fool of a man," whispered one of the lady players, pointing to Delapine. "He sits there staring at the wheel like an idiot, and actually forgot to take up his money, and now it's all swept away. What a fool. Well, it serves him right."

"Yes," replied her companion, "he's evidently a bit soft in the head. What a pity he didn't ask me to play for him."

During the intervals when the wheel was at rest, or when it had just started revolving, Delapine would quietly look round the tables and make a mental note of the characters assembled.

Payot's eyes nearly started out of his head when he saw Renée's huge pile of notes creeping up minute by minute. He touched the professor and spoke to him. Delapine, however, did not for one moment appear to notice, and Renée, dreading lest her father should b reak the spell, touched him on the shoulder.

"Please, father, do keep quiet, or you'll spoil everything."

Payot had the good sense to take the hint and made no further attempt to interrupt.

It was not long before the news of Renée's amazing good fortune spread to the other tables, and soon she found herself surrounded by an eager crowd, pushing and jostling each other in their anxiety to see not only the numbers

she was backing, but the lucky player herself. She had just placed the maximum on ten different chances, and several of the others, noticing how uniformly successful she was, put their money on the same numbers and squares.

Nine out of the ten stakes won, and as the croupiers were paying out the money they suddenly stopped. The bank was broken!

The news spread like wild fire all over the room, and a ringing cheer rose from the crowd.

Renée's pile had reached 700,000 francs.

A few minutes later two attendants came in carrying a large steel box containing a fresh supply of money.

Everyone now resolved to stake his or her cash on the same ventures as Renée.

Delapine who was quietly watching the greedy looks of the crowd round and in front of Renée, squeezed her hand unnoticed in a peculiar way which conveyed to her the hidden meaning. Scribbling a few words on a piece of paper which he folded up, Delapine whispered to Renée, and at the same time handed the folded paper to Payot.

The latter opened the note and read:—

"Do not be alarmed at what is going to happen. I know what I am doing, and I have good reason for doing it."

Ten different chances were selected by Renée and a small amount was placed on each.

"Zero," cried the croupier, and all the stakes were either raked in or placed 'in prison.'

Again Renée staked a couple of hundred francs on six different squares. The others followed. Zero came a second time, and all the previous stakes were swept into the bank, while a fresh lot went into 'prison.' Five times Zero turned up, and Renée lost 12,000 francs. Again and again she staked the same amount on different numbers and colours, and each time five out of the six stakes were swept into the bank. Most of those who had followed her cue dropped away from the table, and many left the room looking very downhearted, some indeed not attempting to hide their disgust.

At length her bad luck was so pronounced that they all ceased to follow her lead, and nearly all those standing

round her had either left the room or had gone to watch the other tables.

Renée had lost 60,000 francs.

Delapine's eyes glistened and some of his natural colour came back, but it was only for a moment. The reaction proved too strong, and leaning back in his chair, he appeared to sink into a deep sleep. It was nearly half an hour before he woke up again. To his surprise he found himself almost alone with Renée. Only the members of his party remained, and they were for the most part scattered about the room. It was half-past twelve, and the crowd had evidently left for lunch.

"Let us go," said Delapine. "After lunch we will make some money."

"Haven't you made enough already?" they asked, laughing.

"No," he replied, "up till now I have only been skirmishing with the ball."

"Good Lord," said Marcel, "he has made nearly three-quarters of a million francs, and he calls that skirmishing. I wonder what his serious play will be like?"

"Have a little patience," said Delapine, "and you shall see."

While waiting for lunch Renée was privately instructed by Delapine as to the plan of campaign for the afternoon's play, and immediately after their meal the professor retired to his room to recover his energy. Shortly afterwards the carriages were ordered, and the party returned to the fray.

On entering the rooms Renée and Delapine resumed the seats which had been retained for them by means of a very liberal tip to the croupier and chef de partie of his table.

Owing to the heavy losses sustained by those who had followed Renée's lead during the later play in the forenoon, very few people stood round the table, and those who were seated were too much afraid to be led again by her.

At first Delapine appeared quite normal as he sat watching the game, but gradually his manner changed, and he seemed to become oblivious to all around him. He stared fixedly at the ball, while Renée, acting under previous instructions, placed the maximum stake on every one of the eleven chances which the game offered.

Sometimes she would place a maximum on Zero only, omitting all the other squares, and would leave it there four or five times running. At other times she would back two numbers of the same colour and put 2,000 francs on each of the even chances. In this way half an hour went by, and Renée's pile of notes steadily increased.

Twenty minutes later the Administration had to bring a third supply. The croupiers began to get anxious. Once more the crowd began to collect, and again Delapine started staking small sums at random. Whenever the other players showed a disposition to follow Renée's lead, her hand would feel a squeeze from Delapine, and she would place her stakes on the wrong numbers, or she would suddenly back the first four numbers, or put a maximum on Zero which was sure to turn up.

Charley and Ridgeway came in, and seeing Payot and Violette, went up to them. Payot whispered a warning to his two friends not to speak to or even to notice Delapine. They nodded in acquiescence.

At length the bank 'broke' for the third time, and play was suspended while the senior members of the Administration were called in. After an anxious consultation a new roulette wheel was brought, and half a dozen detectives were ordered to watch the professor and Renée, with the result that Delapine became quite reckless and lost several thousand francs, while Renée lost her stakes four times in succession. Unfortunately Charley and his friend were plunging heavily, and lost all they had on them.

"C'est rien," said the croupier to the director, "we shall get it all back in an hour—and more," they added significantly. The detectives shrugged their shoulders and left the table at the bidding of the director, but continued to keep their eyes on Renée and Delapine all the same.

Once more Delapine lapsed into his cataleptic condition, and once more Renée 'broke' the bank.

Five times the chef de partie had been obliged to send for fresh supplies of money, and thrice the roulette wheel was changed.

The chef tore his hair. "C'est terrible. The devil

himself must be laying against us," and wringing his hands in helpless despair, he left the room, returning almost immediately with all the members of the Administration.

They all stood round Delapine.

All the players in the room had left their tables and collected in a huge crowd round the two tables, near the end of one of which the professor was sitting with Renée and Payot alongside of him. The crowd made way for the members of the Administration who stood in a half circle round Delapine and his two companions.

They watched Renée put a maximum on the eleven chances and one on No. 4, and saw with their own eyes the little ball tumble into one of the little compartments.

All of them craned their necks to see, and yes, sure enough, the croupier shouted out—"Quatre, noir, pair et manque."

The directors stared at one another, petrified with astonishment.

One of them slipped away hurriedly and returned with Monsieur Eperon the Chef de Police of Monaco and two of his satellites.

"Arrest them," cried the director in a loud voice, pointing to Renée and Delapine.

A moment afterwards the chief cashier of the bank came running into the room.

"Messieurs," he cried, "the bank is empty—not a sou remains in the coffers. Mon Dieu, what are we to do?"

The bank was really broken—for the first time in the history of the Casino.

The Administration formally declared the rooms closed, and Delapine and Renée were escorted to the police station, followed by the whole of their party together with Charley and Ridgeway who formed the rearguard. At length they entered one of the large rooms of the gendarmerie. Monsieur Eperon and two assistants sat down at a high table. Renée and Delapine stood in front of them while the directors stood around, and a whole crowd of witnesses filled the room behind.

The police took the names and addresses of the accused.

"Well, gentlemen, what is the crime you charge us

with?" said the professor, drawing himself up to his full height, and looking at them with one of his commanding gestures.

"You are accused of cheating at the tables," said the Chef de Police.

"Cheating at the tables, what do you mean?"

"The Administration of the Bank accuse you of having bribed the croupiers and of tampering with the wheel," replied M. Eperon, twirling his moustache and looking very fierce.

"That is impossible," replied Delapine, "as the croupiers were changed each time they sent for more money."

The croupiers were brought in and cross-examined. They swore that they had never spoken a word to either the professor or the lady who was playing with him.

In the face of their denial it was seen to be useless to press the charge of bribery in connection with the croupiers, so after discharging them from further attendance, the Chef de Police decided that the solution of the mystery lay in the fact that Delapine and his accomplice must have tampered with the roulette wheel.

"But the wheel has been changed no less than three times," asserted Delapine, "and on the last occasion I heard it remarked that a new wheel was used."

Monsieur Eperon asked if it were true that a perfectly new wheel had been used, and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, shrugged his shoulders in a helpless manner.

A short consultation was then held, as a result of which a roulette wheel was sent for, and the Chef de Police himself spun it round.

"What number would you like the ball to fall into?" enquired Delapine quietly.

"No. 29," replied M. Eperon.

"29 be it," said Delapine, smiling, and as the wheel was spun round the little ball dropped into 29 as he had predicted.

One director after another repeated the experiment, but always with the result that the ball fell into whatever number they suggested. Cheer after cheer arose from the witnesses, and the police were either unwilling or powerless to suppress the applause.

"Une merveille," said M. Eperon, holding up his hands. Everyone was absolutely dumbfounded.

As the directors were unable to maintain any of the charges against Delapine and Renée, they were requested to retire with the police to one of the anterooms, where a further conference was held.

At length they returned, and the Chef de Police asked Delapine how he invariably managed to put his stakes on the winning numbers.

"The law cannot compel me to explain my systems of play, gentlemen, and I refuse to answer. I have broken no law, I never saw either the croupiers or the roulette wheel before. I have not done anything against the regulations. I merely pitted my wits against yours, and I have won. Therein lies the whole of my offence."

At this all the visitors cheered, and were immediately silenced by the police.

M. Eperon was obliged to admit that they could not produce any evidence of guilt, and told the directors he was reluctantly compelled to dismiss the charge.

"What will you accept now to reveal your system to me?" said the head of the Administration in a whisper as he stepped up to the professor.

"If you will first hand over to me 500,000 francs as a reward for my disclosure as well as compensation to my fiancée and myself for our unjust arrest, I will disclose the secret," he replied, "but not otherwise."

At length after some discussion a cheque for the amount asked for by the professor was handed over to him.

"Excuse me," replied Delapine, "but I should much prefer to be paid in notes."

The head of the Administration gave a grim smile as he ordered the sum of half a million francs to be handed to him in crisp bank notes.

"Ah! that is better," replied Delapine as he put them very carefully away in his pocket-book.

"The whole secret, gentlemen," said the professor slowly and with great deliberation, "lies in my will power. It is the power of Mind over Matter. When I concentrate the whole of my will on the little ball, and resolve that it shall stop, it is obliged to do so. That is the whole secret,

gentlemen—'Mens agitat molem' (the mind moves matter) is just as true to-day as it was when Vigil wrote these words nearly nineteen hundred years ago."

Thereupon Delapine took Renée by the hand, and bowing gracefully to the astonished and bewildered officials, and shaking hands with M. Eperon, he left the gendarmerie amid the applause of the crowd.

As his party were leaving the police court, Delapine gave a handsome present to each of the croupiers, and also paid a couple of detectives to assist in carrying the spoils in a large bag to the carriage. On his way out he met a young woman sobbing bitterly.

"What is the matter?" asked Delapine.

She told him that her husband was lying ill in Paris, and there being no means of supporting him and her children, she had sold everything she possessed, and had taken the train to Monte Carlo with the idea of winning sufficient money to keep the home going, and now, alas! she had lost her all.

Delapine gave her his address and told her to call on him at his hotel the next morning, and if he found that her story were true, he would send her home well provided for.

When the party arrived at the Hotel des Anglais, Delapine emptied the contents of the bag on the table.

The counting and piling up in thousands of all their winnings occupied more than an hour, and when at last the task was finished they found themselves in possession of no less than three million seven hundred thousand and fifty francs (3,700,050 francs).

"Now," said the professor to his friend Payot, "do you still doubt my powers? Perhaps this will help to convince you," and after carefully counting them he handed him 1,000,000 francs in crisp notes. Payot, overcome with emotion and weeping tears of joy, wrung his benefactor's hand, but was powerless to speak.

"That is not all," continued Delapine, "here is five hundred thousand francs for Renée's 'dot,' she has fairly earned them by the admirable way in which she carried out my instructions. Without her I could not have succeeded, for had I placed the stakes myself I could not

have concentrated my mind sufficiently to control the movements of the ball."

Then turning to Villebois he said. "Here, my dear friend, is a gift for you," handing him at the same time 350,000 francs, "out of this you will be able to provide for Céleste. For you, my dear friend Beaupaire, is another 350,000 francs, and pray see that Violette has half of it for her 'dot', so that Marcel may be able to display the latest fashions in embroidered waistcoats." One hundred thousand and fifty francs he divided among the rest of the party, and 50,000 frs. he kept for emergencies out of which he paid back Charley and Ridgeway all they had lost, on their promise that they would not gamble in the future, and sent the poor woman away rejoicing to her sick husband in Paris.

"And what are you keeping for yourself, professor?" they all asked.

"I have my salary, and that is quite enough for me. I am merely keeping the remaining one million three hundred and fifty thousand francs, the interest of which I shall devote to the purchase of scientific instruments to assist my poorer students, and to help the poor unfortunates whom I saw were on the verge of being ruined by this pernicious gambling concern. And now," he said, smiling, "you must excuse me as I am sadly in need of a rest to recover from the strain of my mental powers which this game has cost me. I think, ladies and gentlemen, the bank will be unable to declare a dividend at the next half-yearly meeting. By the way, Riche, did you find out the whereabouts of that gentleman I sent you to follow out of the Casino?"

"Oh! yes, we found out he was staying at the Metropole. We saw his name in the books under the signature of Monsieur et Madame Paradis."

"Could you find out nothing more?"

"Nothing whatever," said Riche.

Delapine twirled his moustache meditatively. "Hum, what an odd name! Well, au revoir until to-morrow morning, when we shall have to prepare for our journey to Paris.

CHAPTER XXVI

NEMESIS

When Pierre Duval left by the night train for Bordeaux it was his intention to take one of the Sud Atlantique steamers and sail for South America. On alighting at the terminus at Bordeaux he glanced round to see that no one was observing him, and being satisfied on that score he bid the cocher drive to the Hotel Montesquieu.

"Thank goodness," he said to himself, "I am safe at last, and this day week I shall be on board *La Gascogne*, bound for Rio de Janeiro and no one will recognise me there."

He busied himself during the morning in arranging his affairs, and purchased a first-class ticket at the Compagnie de Navigation Sud Atlantique, and spent the rest of the afternoon in seeing the sights of the town. After dinner he went out for a stroll and purchased an evening paper at one of the kiosks, and to his horror he saw in large type a detailed account of the death of General Duval.

The narrative stated that General Duval had been found lying on the carpet in Pierre's dining-room shot through the heart. The theory of suicide was dismissed as improbable, as although the door was locked on the inside, the windows were wide open, and several pieces of furniture were broken and scattered about the room along with a few coins. It was suggested that some burglars loafing around had seen the valet, and later on, Pierre leaving the house, and surmising that his chambers were empty, had entered his room through the window, and being surprised by the General had shot him during the struggle. The

thieves, fearing lest someone might have heard the shot, had evidently hastily locked the door and escaped by the same window. The police, they added significantly, were reticent on the matter as to the origin of the crime.

The next day a further article appeared in the newspapers announcing that a reward had been offered for any information which might be given which would lead to the arrest of the criminal, and pointed out that the General's only son, Pierre Gaston Duval, was suspected. All of a sudden Pierre passed a hoarding and saw to his horror a police notice pasted on it bearing an enlarged print of his own portrait with a full description of his person, and below in large letters the statement that a reward of five thousand francs would be given to anyone not an accessory to the crime who would give such information as would lead to his arrest.

"H'm," he thought, "it may be as well to lie low until the departure of the steamer, in case there might be someone about who would recognise me in my disguise."

Accordingly he kept to his room, merely going out in the evening to purchase the latest editions of the papers. As the time passed and nothing happened he got more venturesome, and the last evening but one before *La Gascogne* sailed, he said to himself, "I will risk it, and go to the theatre and enjoy myself for the last time in France. Garçon," he said, after table d'hote was over, "bring me the evening paper—are there any good plays at the theatre to-night?"

"I can recommend 'La Debutante,' sir," said the waiter, "I hear it is a very spicy play, and is drawing crowds every night."

Pierre took his advice and secured a box near the stage. He looked round the theatre, sweeping the rows of sightseers one after another with his opera glass, and at length a beautiful woman caught his eye. She was seated in a box directly opposite him, and was apparently all by herself—at least there was no gentleman there. The lady appeared to be half French and half Spanish, and seemed to embody the charms of both races. Her beauty had an

extraordinary fascination for him, and after keeping his opera glasses fixed on her for some time, he noticed to his intense delight that he had attracted her attention as well. He kissed his hand towards her and observed that she inclined her head slightly with a bewitching smile. This was quite enough encouragement for Pierre.

His character was a curious mixture of boldness derived from some hereditary trait which impelled him to deeds of excessive rashness on the spur of the moment, combined with an extreme caution and dread of breaking the law which was the outcome of years of legal practice and training.

The lady was unquestionably handsome. She possessed those languid dark eyes and long silky eyelashes which are the distinguishing feature of the Spanish donna. This was a type of beauty which impressed itself on a man of the sensuous type of Pierre, so stepping out of his box he purchased a magnificent bouquet of flowers, and made his way to the lady's box.

On entering the box he received a smile from his fair divinity as she graciously accepted the proffered bouquet, and pointed to a chair next to her.

"Pray sit down," she said, "it is quite charming to have you by me. We shall be able to have a delightful-tête-a-tête together."

Pierre at once sat down and squeezed her hand with rapture.

The extreme familiarity of the lady would have frightened any sober-minded gentleman away, and would doubtless have made Pierre suspicious and put him on his guard; but he had already taken so much champagne that it had clouded his wits, and he was further intoxicated with her charms. Her voluptuous figure, her winning smiles, her small beautifully modelled hands, rendered still more fascinating by the well-fitting gloves, her brilliant dark wavy hair coiled up in the latest fashion by the art of an expert coiffeur, the delicate perfume, all contributed to hypnotize his senses, and prevent his observing the entire absence of that reserve of manner, and of those qualities which invariably bespeak a real lady in any part of the civilized world.

"I suppose," he said, "you are living by yourself just now?"

"Yes, that is my fate for the present," and then afraid lest he should want to know too much of her private life she added, "What is your name, monsieur, if I may make so bold as to enquire?"

"My name? Oh, my name is Sylvestre Adam—a humble worshipper of you, my divinity," and he put his arm round her waist and gave her a squeeze.

"How very curious," she replied, "my name is Julie Paradis."

"What a pretty name," he answered, "and how appropriate to the occasion. Well I hope Adam will be allowed to remain in Paradise, and will not be expelled from so fair a spot."

"That depends on his behaviour in the garden of Eden," replied Madame Paradis, laughing. "He will be allowed to remain if he does not attempt to pluck any of the forbidden fruit."

"May I not be allowed to receive it from your fair hands?" he added, looking up in her face with a smile.

"Oh, you tempter," she said, tapping him with her fan. "And where do you hail from, Monsieur, I suppose you come from Paris judging from your accent?"

"No. There you are mistaken. A few years ago I used to live in Paris, but my home is in Montevideo, and I only arrived here a few days ago."

"Entonces usted es Porteno?" she replied, in perfect Spanish.

Pierre muttered something in French quite inappropriate to her question. He recognised his fatal mistake, but it was too late.

She looked at his face with a puzzled expression. "Yes, it is something like him," she thought, "but I shall soon find out."

"Ah! monsieur, monsieur," she replied with a smile, "I can see that you are a born Frenchman, and that you have never been to South America. Now confess it, mon ami."

Pierre saw it was no use temporising, so he frankly admitted it with a laugh. He had quite lost his head in

the presence of this charming siren, but although irresistibly attracted by her manners, he nevertheless felt afraid of her. Her face lit up with smiles, but her lips were thin and compressed, and he could feel that she might become a terrible adversary if she had a fit of anger or jealousy.

"You don't seem to be paying much attention to the play, monsieur," she remarked with a smile.

"Well, I confess, madame, you possess charms which far surpass those of the play, and consequently I have been devoting myself exclusively to the enjoyment of your company, instead of watching the actors."

"You flatter me, sir."

"Not at all—not in the least. But if you are not otherwise engaged it would give me immense pleasure to take you out to supper."

"Shall we go?" she enquired in a winning voice.

Pierre assented.

"You can go home now, Marie," she added to her maid.

Pierre took her to a fashionable restaurant on one of the boulevards, and afterwards saw her home.

"What a pity," he said to himself as he entered his hotel, "I shall have no further opportunity of spending an evening in madame's charming company—well, it can't be helped, but I must try to see her, once more, to-morrow afternoon before I leave."

The next day on opening her newspaper, Madame Paradis's attention was drawn to an account of a dreadful murder which had been committed in Paris on a retired general of the name of Duval, and also on a celebrated professor of science, together with a photograph of the suspected criminal.

"Mon Dieu, but this is interesting."

At this moment M. Adam was announced.

"Ah, ma mie," said Pierre, alias Sylvestre Adam, "I trust you are well, and that fortune smiles upon you. Diable! what were you so interested about when I came in?"

"A terrible murder has been committed in Paris. Haven't you seen it? The papers are full of it. General Duval has been brutally murdered by his son. See, here

is the photograph of the assassin," and she showed it to Sylvestre.

A cold shudder went through him as he saw his own likeness in the newspaper. He turned very pale, and seizing a decanter on the table, he poured himself out a glass of wine and tossed it off.

"What's the matter?" she asked, noticing the change which went over him. "Don't you feel well?"

"My dear one," he answered, "no wonder I feel pale, seeing that General Duval is my god-father, and one of my dearest friends. He always placed his house at my disposal. Ah! many a time he has given me a thousand franc note to meet some small debt of honour. Just think of it? To lose one's greatest benefactor in this dreadful way," and he pulled out his handkerchief and wiped away a tear.

"Good God," he said to himself, "however could the police have found it out? I suppose that scoundrel Deschamps, must have given the show away."

"I am really very sorry for you, mon cher," she answered, putting her hands on his shoulders and giving him a kiss on the forehead. As she did so she observed that he was wearing a wig, and looking closer she noticed that his beard was false likewise. Now Pierre's left ear had a very peculiar shape, and on glancing at the photograph in the newspaper which showed the left side of his face, she recognised the same shaped ear at once. Madame gave a little start and dropped the newspaper.

"What is the matter?" said Pierre, carefully scrutinizing her face to see if she had observed anything in the photograph which she could recognise in his features.

"Nothing, mon cher Sylvestre, but you looked so pale that I got frightened. Take another glass of wine, it will do you good."

Pierre seized the decanter, and with a shaking hand poured himself out another glass.

He lay down on the sofa while Madame Paradis, going to the piano, played several airs.

"Pray go on," he said, as she stopped playing, "I quite enjoy it, you play so beautifully. Let us go into the fresh air," he remarked at length. "I think it will do us both

good. We will take a stroll through the public gardens and hear the music, or have some coffee at one of the cafés, and then we can afterwards have some dinner together. Let us make a good night of it, as I regret to say it is my last night in France."

"Why? Where are you going to?" she enquired.

"I have booked my passage by *La Gascogne* which sails to-morrow afternoon for Rio de Janeiro."

"Well," she said, "I will be pleased to see you off if I may."

"That will be delightful," replied Pierre, hoping in his heart that something would turn up to prevent her doing it.

Next morning she went to his hotel, and knocking at his bedroom door went straight in and shut it.

Pierre felt very much annoyed at seeing her march into his room unannounced in this fashion, but he tried to conceal his feelings and even attempted to smile when she said she had come to bid him good-bye. She bid him sit down on the sofa and took a seat by his side. "Now look here, Monsieur Sylvestre, I know quite well who you are. Your real name is Pierre Gaston Duval. Now it's no use denying it," she added, as he was about to reply. "You insulted me at Maxim's Café only a short time ago—do you remember the scene? I know well enough you are the man who is wanted by the police, I could read your guilt in your face, even if I had no other proofs. Do you see this ear?" said she pointing to the photograph with her finger to the print. "Is it not exactly like yours?"

Pierre grew ghastly pale with fear, and trembled from head to foot. He was about to deny all knowledge of it, but she interrupted him.

"You need not look so scared. If you will stay with me and meet a few of my little bills which my dressmaker and others are pressing me with rather inconveniently just now, I promise you I will keep your secret—but if you attempt to run away, or step on board the steamer, I swear I will inform the captain and the police at once. So long as you perform these few favours for me I shall be devoted to you and make you very happy. Only remember, the first time you fail to carry out my requests, you know what will happen," and she shook her finger in his face.

Pierre was furious and raised his fists as if to strike her, but the determination in her face made him pause, and after a short period of reflection he put his arms round her neck and kissed her ardently.

"Well," he said at length, "I see there is nothing for it but to obey you."

"That's a good boy. I see you are beginning to learn your lessons very well. You will find me a wonderfully good teacher," and she smiled and gave him a kiss in return.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders in helpless fashion and looked very gloomy.

Several days passed, and at her request he took a little house near Biarritz where they lived together for some weeks.

At length money was beginning to run short and they both felt the need of a change, so at her request they took the train for Monte Carlo. It was only the second day after their arrival at the Metropole that Pierre recognised Delapine and the rest of the party in the Salle de Jeu. At once he saw the danger he was running, and so hastily quitting the salon he gave Madame the slip and took the night train for Bordeaux.

No sooner had he arrived at Marseilles, and was on the point of leaving, when who should step into the compartment but Madame Paradis.

* * * * * *

The next day after the distribution of the spoils at the Hotel des Anglais, Delapine's party had just finished lunch when Marcel, glancing at Violette's ring, asked her if it had a history.

She related to him the same story she had told Riche a few months before in the café at the corner of the Boulevard Michel.

Riche left his side of the table and examined the ring with Marcel.

"Please, mademoiselle," said Riche, "try and see whether the ring still possesses the power it had when you first showed it to me."

Violette acquiesced, and suggesting that they should adjourn to another room, they all followed suit.

"Now," said Violette, "if you will keep quite still I will see whether it will tell me anything."

All the party including the professor were standing round her. At length she raised her hand as if to command their attention.

"I see a lady and gentleman in a railway carriage all by themselves. The lady has dark hair and is very beautiful. She is wearing a lovely necklace carrying a large beautiful pendant—the couple are getting out. I see the name of the station—it is Agen. Yes, now they are entering the train once more—Oh! look—they are quarrelling. The man is shaking her terribly. Now they are fighting—Mon Dieu! but it is terrible. See he pulls out a pistol and has struck her with all his might on the temple—Ah! she has fallen down—he lifts her up—she is dead."

Payot, Riche and Marcel looked at one another horrified.

"Try whether you can see anything more," said Delapine quietly.

Violette looked once more at the ring.

"Yes, I see the man opening the carriage door—they are entering a tunnel—he has pushed the lady out of the carriage—she has fallen on to the line. Now he shuts the carriage door and sits down. Ah, it is fading away—yes, it is gone, I see nothing more."

All the party looked at Violette and her ring.

"Can you describe the man?" enquired Delapine.

"Yes, he had shiny curly hair, and a small beard and whiskers."

"Did the lady look like this?" said Delapine, showing the photograph he took in the salon the day before.

"Yes, I recognise her at once by the necklace and pendant," said Violette.

He rang the bell and asked the garçon to fetch him a time-table.

"It is now about half-past one," said the professor taking out his watch, "and as there is no stoppage between Agen and Bordeaux, it is evident that Bordeaux is his destination. Bordeaux is the port from which steamers sail for South America and the West Indies. South America is one of the few spots in the world which the arm of the

law cannot easily reach, therefore it is most probable that he intends going there."

"Waiter," he said, "fetch me the Continental Bradshaw. That will give the time of sailings of the various ships."

"Ah, here we have it. *La Gascogne* leaves Bordeaux February 27th, and the *Divona* February 21st. To-day is February 17th. If, therefore, we communicate with the police at once they will have plenty of time to arrest him in Bordeaux."

Delapine stepped up to the bureau and asked them to telephone to Nice for M. Patrigent, the chief of the police.

Monsieur Patrigent was one of the most intelligent members of the force. Active, smart and persevering, he had risen step by step to the head of his department by sheer merit. He was a man who always acted immediately, believing that to strike quickly was to strike effectively.

On receiving the telephone message he knew from its nature and source that it was no ordinary crime he had to deal with. He therefore at once ceased work, and sending his messenger to fetch his motor car he drove at top speed to the Hotel des Anglais.

Villebois informed him of the previous doings of Pierre, of the twice attempted murder of Delapine, of the setting fire to the house, of the probable shooting of his own father. Some of the acts were of course well known to Patrigent, but Villebois was able to explain the motif, and to fill up gaps in the chain of evidence.

The chief of police listened with breathless interest as Villebois unfolded the terrible record of crime, but when he told him what Violette had seen in the ring he shook his head and smiled incredulously.

"These statements are not evidence, they are merely phantasies," he exclaimed. "Delusions, or illusions, or whatever you may please to call them."

"But I assure you, M. Patrigent," said Riche, "what the young lady saw is true, I am certain of it," and he told him of Violette's previous vision with the ring, and pointed out how she had foretold the attempted murder of Delapine in the séance room, and how her own psychic vision saved Delapine's life.

M. Patrigent merely shrugged his shoulders incredulously.

"Well, if you still refuse to believe me I will call Professor Delapine himself, who will endorse every word I have said, as it is only a few weeks since he woke up from his trance."

At the mention of Delapine's name, the chef de police opened his eyes in astonishment, and bowed nearly to the ground as the professor came into the room.

M. Patrigent expressed his unbounded delight at meeting him.

"It is indeed an honour to be permitted to shake hands with the greatest man in Europe," . . . for his recovery from his marvellous trance . . . followed up by his superb play at Monte Carlo . . . his arrest . . . his defence of the charge made against him were becoming the sole subjects of conversation in every town in France. One heard nothing else but stories of the great seer all day long, and they grew in magnitude from hour to hour.

After hearing Delapine's confirmation of Riche's story of the ring, and seeing the photograph which the professor took in the salon, it was not to be wondered at that M. Patrigent became a convert to Violette's psychic powers, and now believed in them as firmly as he was incredulous before.

After shaking hands all round he received Delapine's permission to take away the precious photograph, and bowing profoundly left the apartment.

In about two hours he returned again to inform them that after leaving he had immediately telegraphed to Agen to search the tunnel, and that the body of a lady had been found in the tunnel near the place, precisely as Violette had predicted.

"It is very wonderful, and I don't pretend to explain it, but I am as convinced as you are that the facts are true, and acting solely on mademoiselle's statement, I intend to leave at once for Bordeaux, and if Dr. Riche will do me the honour to accompany me I will make it my business to see that he shall be well rewarded by the Government for his trouble."

Riche, who was listening, assented willingly, and the two gentlemen departed at once by a special train for Bordeaux. They stopped at Marseilles to change engines

and have a hurried dinner at the buffet, and then travelled right through to Bordeaux, merely stopping to make a few enquiries at Agen, and to examine the body which was lying in the inspector's room at the station.

M. Patrigent accompanied by Riche enquired at the office of the Compagnie de Navigation. Unfortunately, no one answering either to the print in the newspapers, or to the description of him given by Violette had been discovered there, but all the police were informed, and were on the alert to pounce upon him. Detectives were examining the faces of every person seen on the landing-stages and wharfs, while others inspected the visitors' books at the various hotels—but all to no purpose.

For three days every available policeman and detective in Bordeaux was hunting up and down the streets examining every hotel, and examining every ship and steamer in the port, but no trace of Duval could be found.

At length, about two hours before the *Divona* was notified to sail the chef de police received a lengthy telegram from Villebois. It read as follows:—

"Last night Professor Delapine had a psychic vision; he saw Pierre Duval in a room changing his clothes. He disguised himself as a Gascony farmer. Was dressed in his Sunday coat with large buttons, a slouch hat with broad brim, and leggings. He put on a long yellow-brown beard, and the same coloured hair hanging down to his shoulders, blue spectacles and a crooked stick. He left the inn in a cab, with a large wooden box, and went on board steamer as a third-class passenger. Act immediately on this information. Villebois."

M. Patrigent at once had copies of the telegram distributed to the chief centres by boys on bicycles, and hastening with Riche on board the *Divona* they inspected the third-class passengers and rooms. Suddenly Riche in his excitement called out.

"See, there he is," and he pointed with his finger.

"Where?" asked the chief of the police, trembling with excitement.

But Riche had spoken so loud that the person in question slipped away and vanished among the crowd.

At that moment the ship's siren uttered a loud blast, while several sailors prepared to unfasten the gangway.

"Keep an eye on him, doctor," said Patrigent, bounding on deck as the visitors were leaving the ship.

At length the chef de police shrugged his shoulders in despair, and stepped on the gangway to depart.

"You must have been mistaken, doctor, he cannot possibly be on board, he must have eluded us and escaped by another route."

"Monseiur, for God's sake stay where you are, I am convinced he is hiding on board."

Monsieur Patrigent hesitated for an instant, but observing Riche's look of entreaty, turned back behind the sailors, while Riche rushed up the gangway and joined him.

A few minutes later the steamer slipped her moorings and slowly steamed down the Gironde.

All the officers were on the look-out for the missing man, and the ship was searched from stem to stern.

At length they got information that a Gascon peasant had been seen entering one of the third-class cabins. The chef de police and Riche rushed to the cabin indicated and tried to open the door, but they found it locked and bolted.

Riche stood by the door, while Monsieur Patrigent returned with a couple of loaded revolvers and an axe.

Handing one of the pistols to Riche, he burst in the panels of the door with three or four furious blows of his axe.

"At last we have got you, monsieur," said the police officer as he pulled out of his pockets a pair of handcuffs, and struggled to get through the broken door.

The peasant uttered a wild cry of mocking laughter.

"Ha, ha! I will defeat you yet," he shouted, "I shall never let you take me alive," and taking out a small phial he drank its contents to the last drop.

The chef de police and one of the sailors burst in and seized the man, while Riche tore off his wig and beard. There stood Pierre with a wild look in his eyes, but before they could pinion him, he cried out, "Tell Professor Delapine the drug I swallowed was meant for him." He suddently became short of breath, and reeled like a drunken man, and with a last shriek he burst from their grasp, and

throwing up his hands, fell down on the floor of the cabin foaming at the mouth.

The chef de police and Riche stooped down and raised him up, but it was too late,—he was dead.

M. Patrigent had the body sewn up in a sack, and dropped it into the pilot's boat at the mouth of the river, while he and Riche followed immediately afterwards.

Some hours later they returned to Bordeaux where the body was identified as that of Pierre Gaston Duval.

The day following it was interred in a nameless grave in the cemetery at Bordeaux by permission of the authorities at M. Payot's special request.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH DELAPINE FINDS HIMSELF FAMOUS, AND THE PARTY BREAKS UP WITH THE HAPPIEST RESULTS

THE evening after the departure of Monsieur Patrigent and Riche for Bordeaux, Delapine and his party left for Paris. The professor had already telegraphed to his colleagues at the Sorbonne informing them of the time of his arrival, but his modesty was such that it never occurred to him that anyone would ever take the trouble to meet him. Imagine, therefore, his astonishment as the train steamed into the station to hear a tumultuous hum proceeding from a thousand throats, and to find the entire Gare de Lyon decorated with flowers and flags.

"What on earth is this huge crowd here for?" he asked Villebois as he looked out of the window.

The doctor had no need to reply, for the moment the crowd caught sight of the professor tumultuous shouts of "Vive Delapine, vive le professeur," rose up in one mighty laryngeal blast. Scores of people stretched out their hands as if to embrace him, while others threw bouquets into the carriage. In fact the crowd was so great that it required a dozen gendarmes to clear a passage for him and his party. It was with great difficulty that he managed to reach the barriers on the platform.

"Look, Henri," said Renée, pointing to a magnificent floral arch at the gateway on which "VIVE DELAPINE SOYEZ LE BIENVENU" was written in huge gilt letters around the curve of the arch.

"I feel the proudest girl in all France," said Renée, beaming.

Delapine was more than surprised, he was electrified,

enchanted, bewildered. His eyes flashed with excitement, and he was utterly unable to express his feelings in words.

Such was the fame that the professor had acquired first by his extraordinary and unique recovery from the trance, and then by his astounding play at Monte Carlo, that not only was the station crowded to suffocation, but the approach to it was lined by an enthusiastic crowd, extending as far back as the Column of July, and filling the Place de la Bastille.

A magnificent carriage had been brought to the station for the professor, and so excited were the students that they had removed the horses, and twenty or more of them decorated with red sashes stood with ropes over their shoulders ready to drag the carriage to the Sorbonne.

It was evident that the students had abandoned all thought of work that day, and the professors catching their enthusiasm joined them in a body. Had it been the Czar of all the Russians he could not have caused a tithe of the excitement and tremendous cheering that Delapine evoked as he stepped from the train on to the platform. On leaving the station, Delapine with Renée on his arm and Payot immediately behind them were conducted to their carriage by the senior professors of the university. Immediately behind followed a second carriage with the Villebois family, while Monsieur and Madame Beaupaire with Violette and Marcel occupied a third one. Such a sight had not been witnessed for many years. The cheering was deafening. Delapine was obliged to keep bowing every moment along the route. "Vive Delapine!" could be heard on all sides until the cry became a mighty roar of voices all along the route.

On arriving at the Sorbonne he was ushered into a large room where a special banquet had been prepared for the professor and his party. Scientists were present from every part of France. The scene that ensued baffled all description.

Speeches were made, songs were sung by celebrated divas and tenors specially engaged for the occasion, while the students themselves united in singing a song specially composed for the event.

As the dinner drew towards the end, a deputation from

his students presented Delapine with a beautifully carved silver casket containing an illuminated address.

After the health of the hero of the hour had been drunk amid ringing cheers from every part of the room, the professor got up to reply.

"Mes honorables collegues et mes amis," said Delapine, quite overcome by the enthusiasm and affection displayed by his pupils. "I thank you from my heart for these signs of your affection and esteem for my poor efforts on your behalf (cries of 'no, no,' on all sides) and also for your expressions of sympathy with me during my prolonged state of trance, and the pleasure you have shown at my restoration to health. I have, like Ulysses, returned from my wanderings, and I rejoice to be with you once more. (Great applause and shouts of 'hurrah for Delapine!')

"I have not," he continued as soon as silence had been restored, "I have not altogether wasted my time since I left you last if I have been able to prove that a new era is dawning, and that wonders upon wonders are looming up in the horizon of our view. The spirit world is approaching nearer and nearer. Things which were inconceivable to our fathers are becoming commonplace to-day. Our great-grandfathers communicated with each other at a distance by means of beacons and flags; our grandfathers by means of mirrors and the semaphore; our fathers by the telegraph, while we communicate by means of the more convenient telephone and wireless ether waves; but mark me, our children or at least our grandchildren, will communicate their inmost thoughts by the infinitely more rapid psychic waves of the soul. (Deafening cheers followed). Writing and speech will be largely replaced by telepathy and thought transference. Both the past and the future will become unfolded to our mental gaze like a scroll.

"If we follow nature's laws and search into its hidden mysteries with an open mind, we shall march on from victory to victory (shouts of 'Vive la France!') we shall form a compact army of students who will refuse to acknowledge defeat. We shall be able to converse with the spirits of those who have gone before, and passed over to the other side. As my illustrious colleague, Sir Oliver Lodge, so eloquently puts it, 'The boundary between

the two states—the known and the unknown—is still substantial, but it is wearing thin in places; and like excavators engaged in boring a tunnel from opposite ends, amid the roar of water and other noises, we are beginning to hear now and again the strokes of the pick-axes of our comrades on the other side.' Gentlemen, it is our solemn duty to search out the 'raison d'etre' of our existence on this planet, and to ascertain whither we are drifting.

"We must find an answer to the questions put by the immortal Heine:

> "Sagt mir was bedeutet der Mensch?
> Wohin ist er gekommen? Wo geht er her?
> Wer wohnt dort oben auf goldenen Sternen? *

"If you cannot discover the known from the unknown you can at least, like the newly discovered elements, Niton, Thorium, and Actinium, excite activity in others. We must refuse to acknowledge defeat. I do not ask you to waste your precious time in fruitless efforts to win the Wolfskehl prize of 125,000 frs. by attempting to find a positive solution of Fermat's great theorem, that $x^n + y^n = z^n$†. You, gentlemen, can well afford to leave such investigations to the German professors and the students of Göttingen. We Frenchmen have no time for such speculations, so long as rich pastures of fruitful and practical facts await discovery on every hand. Organic chemistry is only beginning to be unfolded and treated mathematically. We know the laws of gravity, but what is the cause of it? How does one

* "Oh, tell me now what meaning has man,
Or whence he comes, and whither he goes,
Who dwells beyond upon the golden stars?"

† Thus to give a simple case: Let $x = 3$, $y = 4$, $z = 5$, and $n = 2$. Then $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$. What the professor had in his mind was a general expression which would embody all cases, in which n may be any integer. It is well-known that Fermat discovered the solution, but it was unfortunately lost, although his papers were searched through at his death. The prize is still open for competition, 1916. All particulars can be obtained from the rector of the University of Göttingen. (G. L. J.)

body attract another at a distance, with nothing but the invisible and intangible Ether between them? The questions asked by Hypatia, the daughter of Theon, the geometer of Alexandria, fifteen hundred years ago, 'Who am I, what am I, whence do I go, and what is the soul of man?' remain unanswered to-day. If you study the smallest object, or the meanest insect, you cannot help making important discoveries, if you only go about it in the right way. The fields are already white unto the harvest and the labourers are few. If we would spend our lives like men we must work as long as our frail bodies will hold out. Do not let us be put to shame by the tiny insects. Look at the Megachile, the Anthidium, the Halictes and the wild bee Chalcidoma who, as our illustrious naturalist Henri Fabre informed us, work for the very joy of it, until they drop dead from sheer fatigue. So eager are they, that they even allow themselves to be killed rather than give up their work. It is not our business to read history, rather let it be our task to make it. (Deafening applause). I am merely a pioneer in the field of science. (cries of 'No, no'). I have just peeped behind the veil which screens our view from the unknown beyond. It remains for you to tear that veil asunder. Truly it has been said 'Labore est orare.' Let us then work until we die, and when our work is finished:

> "O, may we join the choir invisible,
> Of those immortal dead who live again
> In minds made better by their presence: live
> In pulses stirred to generosity,
> In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
> For miserable aims that pierce the night like stars,
> And with their mild persistence urge man's search
> To vaster issues.

"Gentlemen," he added, "I have one thing to say before I sit down. My illness has not been without its compensations, for it has been the means of my winning a lovely bride," and he pointed to Renée, who became suffused with blushes.

The rest of his remarks were drowned by terrific applause, intermingled with shouts of "Delapine for ever," "Three

cheers for the bride," "Good old Delapine," during which the professor sat down.

Other speeches followed, and it was with difficulty that the professor and his fiancée ultimately managed to reach their carriage and drive away.

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A fortnight later Delapine and Renée, together with Marcel and Violette, were married by civil contract at the Mairie, and then a little later the next day the religious ceremony was performed at the Church of La Trinité.

The breakfast took place in the dining-room and séance-room (which were thrown into one for the occasion) at the house of the happy couple's old friend, Dr. Villebois.

"Villebois," said Riche at the wedding breakfast, "I owe all my happiness to meeting you at the café at the corner of the Boule 'Miche' last autumn."

"And I owe all mine to Payot losing his pile," retorted Marcel. "If he had not 'plunged' he would not have met Beaupaire, and I should not have seen Violette."

"And Renée's marriage is all due to that lucky café, for there it was that I met Mdlle. Violette," said Riche.

"You?" said Marcel, astonished, as he ceased for a moment admiring his superb silk waistcoat.

"Yes, it was there that she told me what she saw in the ring, half an hour after I met Villebois there for the first time. And I fully believe it saved Delapine's life, for it was owing to Violette's clairvoyance of the sealed envelope that I persuaded Dr. Roux to cease performing the autopsy."

"Good gracious," said Marcel, "here are three people who go and get married and their wives receive handsome dots all because you happened to sit down and smoke a pipe outside a café. Well! if that doesn't beat the professor's play at the tables I'm a Dutchman."

"I wonder whether we have heard the last of Delapine," said Violette.

"The last of Delapine!" exclaimed Marcel. "Don't worry, you will hear plenty more yet about him."

"Don't you remember he told Renée that when he recovered he intended to dictate his memoirs?"

"Yes, I remember, and in his speech at the Sorbonne he said he was going to make history instead of learning it."

"By Jove," said Marcel, "you are right. We are going to have some fun ahead to look forward to."

"Céleste," said Riche, as he took her little hand in his, "we are nobodies just now. The effulgence of Delapine and Marcel is too dazzling. I think we had better wait a few weeks until everyone is breathing a more sober atmosphere, and then we can have a quiet wedding all to ourselves." And they did.

THE END.

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